



Wider Opportunities for Women



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Release of Data on Poverty Reveals Need to Establish Pathways to Economic Security for All

TRENTON--New poverty data in New Jersey shows that economic security is an elusive goal for families of all ages. As released today by the American Community Survey, the overall poverty rate for 2008 was 8.7% in New Jersey and for elders age 65 and over, the percentage of those in poverty was 7.9%. At a time when families of all ages are facing increased housing and health care costs, these poverty statistics reveal that growing numbers of workers, families and elders are struggling to get by.

The release of the New Jersey poverty data this year was accompanied by a growing drumbeat in the media over the need for an alternative to the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to more accurately reflect what is needed to make ends meet. The New Jersey Foundation for Aging (NJFA) and Wider Opportunities for Women are encouraging the White House and members of Congress to adopt the approach taken by a measure used by both organizations: the Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index). The Elder Index provides a more realistic measure of what it costs to age in place.

The Elder Index for a single renter in good health was \$25,941 compared to the federal poverty level for a person 65 and over of \$10,400 in 2008. The Elder Index demonstrates that many seniors fall short of what they actually need to meet their basic needs, even though they are not considered impoverished under the official poverty definition, using the outdated FPL.

Although never intended to be the sole source of income in retirement, one in four seniors in New Jersey live on Social Security alone, most of whom are women. Findings from the Elder Index demonstrate that Social Security income alone fails to provide economic security. Social Security averages just \$12,741 for an older woman, providing less than 50% of what's needed to make ends meet for a single elder renter in good health.

"Because many more seniors must continue working into their retirement years, policies must be shaped to accommodate their need to develop new skills and to obtain flexible work arrangements. Like the many women who work part-time due to care-giving responsibilities, older workers deserve proportionate access to health, retirement and unemployment benefits, and they should be spared penalties on their pensions," stated Joan Kuriansky, Executive Director of WOW.

To combat poverty and bring more New Jersey elders toward economic security in our state, the NJFA recommends addressing the highest basic cost, housing.

- Increase access to affordable housing including Federal housing programs and the State Rental Assistance programs
- Support the provision of property tax rebate

Grace Egan, Executive Director of NJFA added, “We must recognize that aging issues are truly intergenerational. Today’s economic issues facing working families and individuals will impact their economic security in later life. State policies and programs must include the long-term goal of promoting economic security across the generations, for if we don’t address these concerns today we are fostering lifelong poverty.”

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NJFA was incorporated in 1998 with the statewide mission to support innovative services and public policies that enable seniors to live in the community with independence and dignity. To learn more visit,

www.njfoundationforaging.org

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) leads two national networks promoting economic security within the United States: the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) focusing on the needs of low- income working families and the Elder Economic Security Initiative, addressing what income seniors require to age in place. WOW works in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and at the federal level to promote programs and policies that accurately measure the income and assistance needs of families and the elderly. For more information, please visit www.wowonline.org