



**Statement of Christopher St. John  
Executive Director, Maine Center for Economic Policy  
On U.S. Census Release of Poverty Data for 2010  
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The new census data released today affirms the trend of growing numbers of people nationally who live in poverty. In Maine too many people remain living in poverty. Mainers have been aware that while unemployment rates have been lower here than the national average, there are still over 100,000 Mainers unemployed, underemployed, or discouraged from looking for work within their area and skills. While it is not surprising that as people remain without employment longer and longer their households fall deeper towards or further into poverty, we should see this data as sounding an alarm for the need for policy solutions to address the needs of so many households in Maine and the whole country.

Today's release from the American Community Survey (ACS) affirms the trends that appeared in last week's release from the Current Population Survey. On the national level both sets of data give confidence to the estimates that the numbers of American people in poverty are higher than at any time in the last forty years.

The ACS estimates that over 167,000 Maine people (12.9%) live in poverty. But it is important to note that findings from the Maine Department of Labor estimates of "basic needs budgets" suggest that households would need over 200% of the federal poverty thresholds to meet their basic needs of food, housing, health care, transportation, child care, and taxes. See <http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/2010MaineEstimatedLivableWage.pdf>

Median household incomes fell nationally, and have fallen significantly from their 2007 peak in Maine, from \$48,265 to \$45,815. Clearly, the negative economy has affected many more people than those below the official poverty level. This data affirms the experiences of Maine community service and state agencies that the needs are growing while the programs are threatened with budget cuts.

The survey data which show that the poverty rate among employed people is only 5.3% while among unemployed people it is 31.3% underscores the relationship between unemployment and poverty. Among people who have full-time work, the rate is only 1.7%, while among people who work only part-time or part year 14.5% are poor by the U.S. Census definition.

The relationship between education levels and poverty is also not surprising. While only 3.6% of people with a bachelor's degree or higher are poor, among adults with less than a high school degree, 24.8% are poor.

These data reinforce the importance of education, training and job-creation to get more Maine people into jobs that can support them and their families. The data also demonstrate the vital role of programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), Medicaid, LIHEAP, and the Earned Income Tax Credit in reducing the ill-effects of poverty on many Mainers and assuring their access to education and employment.

This is a wake up call for policymakers in Washington and Augusta, who will be considering the future of these programs over the next weeks and months, as well as other measures to grow jobs and stimulate the economy. The data released today should give them all the information they need to redouble their efforts to maintain the safety net programs upon which too many households must rely, and to grow the jobs that will raise living standards for everyone. In the richest country in the world and our resourceful state, we can and must do better.

We are delighted to be joined today by Dean Crocker and Claire Berkowitz of the Maine Children's Alliance, Ana Hicks of Maine Equal Justice Partners, and Pat Kosma, of the Kennebec Valley Communit Action program to share their views of poverty in Maine.