



Helping People. Changing Lives.

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2010 Poverty Data

Poverty Rates Reflect What MCAA is Seeing

By Pat Kosma, President of the Maine Community Action Association (MCAA) and Executive Director of the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program

The new poverty rates, as sad and disappointing as they are, are not surprising to the members of MCAA. Its 10 agencies serve 180,000 Maine residents each year in over 100 locations across all 16 counties. We provide a variety of services to low and moderate income Maine residents, including applications for the low income heating assistance program (LIHEAP), housing and weatherization, health care, transportation, and child care/Head Start. We have seen a steady increase in demand for our services ever since the economy first entered recession in 2008.

It is important to stress that families just above poverty level are suffering greatly, as well. 161,000 Mainer's live in poverty, but many thousands more struggle to meet the basic demands of daily living. Their struggles will only get worse as ARRA and other funds go away.

All of the members of MCAA are familiar with LIHEAP. Unfortunately, the federal government has chosen this year to significantly roll back eligibility and benefits for LIHEAP. The eligibility changes have eliminated 9,195 families who received LIHEAP benefits last year from the program, out of 60,000 families served. Given this poverty data, we know most of those families are still in need. We see them at our agencies and it saddens us to turn them away. Many of those families will struggle to provide food, heat, clothing, and other basic needs this winter.

Even those families who remain eligible for LIHEAP may not be able to rely on the program for assistance this year. The administration's proposed budget reduces LIHEAP funding by 50% and many members of Congress have called for significant budget cuts. The debt reduction deal in Congress requires a \$21 billion cut in the coming fiscal year and that could be even greater if the Supercommittee reaches a deal. Last year, over 60,000 Maine families received over \$50 million in LIHEAP benefits.

It's important to remember that the LIHEAP program targets the most vulnerable populations for assistance. This means seniors and households with children under two. All four members of Maine's Congressional Delegation have been supportive of LIHEAP and we need their continued support.

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