

For Immediate Release

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Oregon's Poverty Rate Rises in First Year of Recession

(Silverton) — Oregon was one of only eight states to see its poverty rate rise during the first year of the recession, according to results of the American Community Survey (ACS) released today by the U.S Census Bureau.

The survey estimated that 13.6 percent of Oregonians — more than 506,000 people — lived in poverty in 2008. That rate was significantly above Oregon's 12.9 percent poverty rate in 2007, according to Joy Margheim, policy analyst with the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

"We weren't winning the war on poverty before the economic downturn, much less now," Margheim said. "And the news will likely get worse next year, when the survey takes into account 2009, the worst period of the recession."

The ACS ranked Oregon 18th highest among states and the District of Columbia for the share of people living below the poverty level in 2008, though Oregon's poverty rate was no different from the nation's as a whole.

In terms of child poverty, the survey estimated that more than 148,000 children (17.5 percent) in Oregon lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold, figures that showed no real change from 2007 to 2008. That placed Oregon 24th among all states and the District of Columbia in terms of its child poverty rate, no different than the nation as a whole.

Of the 15 Oregon counties for which data were reported, only Jackson County registered an increase in the share of people living in poverty, which rose from 13.1 percent in 2007 to 16.5 percent in 2008.

Two of the 15 counties saw a significant increase in child poverty. Jackson County saw its child poverty rate rise from 15.4 to 25 percent from 2007 to 2008. Deschutes County's child poverty rate increased from 7 percent to 15.1 percent from 2007 to 2008.

The ACS reports single-year estimates for counties and smaller geographic units only if their population is 65,000 or larger.

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The survey results confirm the need for Oregon to develop a plan to address the state's long-term failure to reduce overall poverty and child poverty rates, according to Margheim. She said that both rates are at the same level as at the start of the decade, despite the fact that the economy grew in the intervening years.

"Oregon needs a plan of action, with goals and timetables, to reduce its poverty rate," said Margheim. "Our state's economy will never be truly healthy if we repeatedly let a significant portion of our population fall into poverty."

The failure of Oregon to reduce poverty also appeared in another survey the Census Bureau released earlier this month, the Current Population Survey. Margheim noted that the results of the CPS and the ACS cannot be compared directly, because of differences in the questions and survey designs.

In the survey released today, the seven other states that saw an increase in poverty from 2007 to 2008 were California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

The Oregon Center for Public Policy is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax and economic issues. The Center's goal is to improve decision making and generate more opportunities for all Oregonians.