

For Immediate Release

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Share of Oregon Families Who Work But Are Still Poor Increases

Holding a job is not enough to lift many Oregon families out of poverty, and the problem is getting worse, according to a [new study released today](#) by the Oregon Center for Public Policy. The public policy think tank called on the Oregon legislature to address the problem by substantially raising the state minimum wage and addressing wage theft.

“At the end of the day, poverty is a matter of not having enough money to make ends meet,” said Tyler Mac Innis, an analyst with the Center. “Right now many jobs pay too little, leaving a lot of working families stuck in poverty.”

Analyzing recently released Census data, the Center found that the share of Oregon families living below the federal poverty line despite having at least one parent working increased from 10 percent before the start of the Great Recession in 2007 to 12.7 percent in 2014. Over much of that period, real wages for workers at the bottom of the pay scale declined.

In 2014, 71 percent of Oregon families with children living in poverty had at least one parent who worked, according to the Center. And nearly one in four poor families (24 percent) had a parent who worked full-time.

“The federal definition of poverty is too low a bar for measuring what it really takes to get by, and yet tens of thousands of Oregon working families can’t rise above that level,” said Mac Innis.

The poverty line for a single parent raising one child was \$16,317 in 2014. That family would need nearly three times that amount to reach a decent yet modest standard of living, if that family lived in rural Oregon, the Center noted, citing a “family budget calculator” published by the Economic Policy Institute. The family would need more if they lived in Portland or other Oregon cities.

“Poverty comes at a great cost, not only in the suffering of parents and children who lack the basic necessities, but in that poverty undermines individuals’ ability to fulfil their potential and contribute to the state’s economy,” said Mac Innis.

“A substantially higher minimum wage is a direct route to addressing the problem,” the study concludes. “But a higher minimum wage can mean little if employers shortchange workers on the wages they have earned. That is why putting in place robust rules that deter employers from stealing wages is also imperative.”

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Page 2 of 2

The Oregon Center for Public Policy (www.ocpp.org) is a non-partisan, non-profit 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.

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Note to editors and reporters:

Read the fact sheet [Poverty Despite Work: A Growing Problem in Oregon](#), December 16, 2015.