

# NEWS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY REACTS TO CENSUS FIGURES ON POVERTY

EDISON – “The Census numbers show that, while the recession officially has ended, it is not over for hundreds of thousands of New Jersey families, children and individual adults,” said Melville D. Miller, Jr., president of Legal Services of New Jersey. He noted the poverty rate in New Jersey in just two years has jumped from 8.7 to 10.3 percent. “That’s an unprecedented two-year rate of increase of 18.4 percent,” he asserted, adding, “The jump in just the last year alone is 9.6 percent. We have not seen such increases in decades.”

And Miller added, “Given the economy, it should not be surprising that median household income decreased last year in 13 of New Jersey’s 21 counties. What is most remarkable, though, is that in a state with the second highest median household income in the nation, the latest statistics and other information show the numbers of people in poverty in New Jersey are still increasing dramatically. And many of these people now are experiencing poverty for the first time. ”

The LSNJ president said the impact has been sweeping for many New Jerseyans. “People once deemed to be in the middle class are increasingly falling into the ranks of the impoverished.”

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Others at Edison-based LSNJ also offered comments and analysis about the Census findings on poverty in 2010.

A key point offered by Allan Lichtenstein, co-director of the LSNJ Poverty Research Institute, is that the Census numbers most often cited refer to people living at the 100 percent of poverty level, and therefore don't tell the full story.

“For New Jersey, true poverty exists for anyone living below 200 percent of the official federal poverty level,” he said. “When you consider true poverty in New Jersey, there are more than 2 million people, including some 600,000 children, with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty standard.” And that, he stressed, amounts to “about one of every four adults in the state and about one of every three children in true poverty.”

In 2010, the 100 percent poverty threshold for a family of four (two adults and two children) was \$22,113. LSNJ officials have long maintained that true poverty is at the 200 percent level, which better reflects higher costs of living in the Garden State.

Shivi Prasad, senior researcher and policy analyst at the LSNJ Poverty Research Institute, said there's no getting away from the fact that “Poverty breeds a vicious cycle.” Research, she said, “demonstrates that poverty leads to the break-up of families, evictions, foreclosures, people going hungry, worsening health problems and even, at times, lawlessness.” Asserted Prasad, “The impact on all of society is tremendous. It cannot be ignored.”

LSNJ officials noted that many people are effectively locked in poverty even while they are working. For such individuals, generally referred to as the “working poor,” the quality of available jobs and wages are too low to get them beyond the poverty level.

Legal Services of New Jersey is the coordinating office for the state's system of Legal Services programs, which provide essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people in all 21 counties of New Jersey. The LSNJ Poverty Research Institute, established in 1997, conducts systemic research on the incidence, effects and other aspects of poverty, in an effort to increase awareness and understanding, identify solutions, and thereby reduce the legal and other problems of those in poverty. Its annual *Poverty Benchmarks*, a detailed report on poverty and state responses, will be released early next year.