

Immediate Release

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Census Data Indicates No Economic Progress

West Virginia Continues to Rank Close to Bottom on Most Indicators

On Tuesday, the U.S. Census Bureau released the full 2008 American Community Survey that includes statistics on poverty, income, and health insurance coverage. The Mountain State showed little progress in these areas and continues to rank near the bottom on most key indicators.

These findings, however, do not reflect the full impact of the economic recession. The national recession officially began in December 2007 but did not begin to take its toll on West Virginia until November 2008. Earlier this month by the Center released a report, "**Recession Raises Poverty in West Virginia, Especially Among Children,**" which shows that the current recession could drive an additional 127,000 people into poverty, including 36,000 children. If past recessions are any clue, incomes and health care coverage have already fallen below those reported in the 2008 survey.

West Virginia highlights from the American Community Survey include the following:

- The state's **total poverty rate** across all age groups remained flat in 2008 at 17.0 percent, up only 0.1 percent from 2007. West Virginia ranked 7th highest in the country in poverty.
- The state's **child poverty rate** was 22.4% in 2008, down slightly from 24.6 percent in 2007. Despite the decrease, West Virginia climbed to 7th highest in the country in child poverty – two positions worse than in 2007.
- The state's **family poverty rate** was 13% in 2008, up slightly from 2007 (12.4%). Approximately 67,700 families in West Virginia were considered poor in 2008.
- The state's **median household income** was \$37,989 in 2008, down \$495 from 2007. Median household income measures the income of the typical household – or the household in the middle of the income distribution – and serves as a good barometer for how the middle-class is faring. West Virginia ranked second to last in median household income, ahead of only Mississippi. Border state Maryland ranked highest at \$70,545.
- In 2008, an estimated 15.8 percent of West Virginians (283,179 people) lacked **health insurance coverage**. The uninsured rate was higher for working age adults (18 to 64 years) at 22.6 percent.

The U.S. average for these two categories was slightly lower at 15.1 and 19.8 percent, respectively.

The American Community Survey also showed income disparities across different metropolitan areas. For instance, the poverty rate in the Bluefield Area was almost 5 percentage points higher than in the Charleston Area. The Bluefield Area also had the lowest household income in the state at \$33, 654.

“West Virginia can take action to address our high poverty rates, especially among children,” said Ted Boettner, director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. “For example, we could join 24 other states that have enacted a state Earned Income Tax Credit, which would put more money in the pockets of 133,000 low-income working families. The state could also increase and index the state minimum wage to cover more people and remove many of the asset limits on safety net programs.”

2008 RANKINGS of POVERTY, INCOME, EARNINGS, & HEALTH CARE: WV AND U.S.

	WV	US Average	2008 WV Ranking	2007 WV Ranking
Total Poverty Rate	16.9%	13.0%	7th Highest	6th Highest
Child Poverty Rate	22.4%	18.2%	7th Highest	9th Highest
Seniors in Poverty	10.5%	9.9%	17th Highest	16th Highest
Median Household Income	\$37,989	\$52,029	50th Lowest	2nd Lowest
Median Earnings of Full-Time Females	\$27,472	\$35,471	50th Lowest	50th Lowest
Median Earnings of Full-Time Males	\$40,941	\$44,255	40th Lowest	39th lowest
No Health Insurance Coverage (Age 18-64)	22.6%	19.8%	*	*
No Health Insurance Coverage (Total)	15.8%	15.1%	*	*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Rankings include District of Columbia), 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey

WEST VIRGINIA LOCAL/METROPOLITAN AREAS

POVERTY AND MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME & HEALTH CARE COVERAGE, 2007-8

	2007	2008	2007	2008	2008
	Poverty Rate		Median Household Income		No Health Insurance*
Charleston, WV Metro Area	14.2%	15.7%	\$39,829	\$42, 932	21.9%
Beckley, WV Micro Area	15.8%	20.0%	\$39,498	\$33,803	21.2%
Bluefield, WV-VA Micro Area	21.4%	21.1%	\$31,548	\$33,654	21.7%
Clarksburg, WV Micro Area	18.5%	19.3%	\$36,871	\$36,726	26.2%
Huntington-Ashland, WV-KY-OH Metro Area	19.1%	17.7%	\$34,903	\$35,536	22.9%
Morgantown, WV Metro Area	16.5%	15.9%	\$39,319	\$43,002	18.2%
Wheeling, WV-OH Metro Area	15.7%	15.5%	\$35,446	\$38,687	20.0%
Weirton-Steubenville, WV-OH Metro-Area	14.5%	16.8%	\$38,698	\$38,079	19.5%
Parkersburg-Marietta-Vienna OH Metro Area	15.8%	17.8%	\$39,701	\$42,266	18.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey

*Age 18-64

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The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy is a policy research organization that is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and statewide. It focuses on how policy decisions affect all West Virginians, especially low- and moderate-income families. The report, "Recession Raises Poverty in West Virginia, Especially Among Children," is available at www.wvpolicy.org.