

Immediate Release

September 20, 2012

Contact: Sean O'Leary, 304-720-8682, soleary@wvpolicy.org

Child Poverty Remains High Throughout West Virginia

Thousands Still Remain Without Health Care

In addition to the high unemployment that has plagued West Virginia since the end of the recession, today's release of the 2011 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau shows hundreds of thousands of West Virginia children continued to live in poverty throughout the state. The data, which include statistics on poverty, income, and health insurance, confirm the struggle many families face day to day.

"The large number of children in poverty in the state illustrates the need for government action," said Ted Boettner, Executive Director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. "Working families are struggling to get by, and now is the time to step up our efforts to help, not cut back."

West Virginia highlights from the 2011 American Community Survey include the following:

- The state's **poverty rate** across all age groups was **18.6** percent in 2011, up from **18.1** percent in 2010. The weak recovery has resulted in a total of **334,885** West Virginians living in poverty. West Virginia ranked **10th** highest among the 50 states in poverty.
- The state's **child poverty rate** was **25.8** percent in 2011, up from 25.5 percent in 2010. **97,677** children lived in poverty in 2011. West Virginia ranked **12th** highest among the 50 states in child poverty.
- The state's **poverty rate** for African-Americans was **34.8** percent in 2011, up from 29.1 percent in 2010. The **poverty rate** for African Americans was **16.2** points higher than the state average.
- The state's **poverty rate** for West Virginians aged 65 years and older was **9.4** percent in 2011, down from 9.9 percent in 2010. The **poverty rate** for older West Virginians was **9.2** points lower than the state average.
- Education remains a strong shield against poverty. The **poverty rate** for West Virginians with a bachelor's degree or higher was **4.1** percent in 2011, while the **poverty rate** for those with only a high school diploma was **15.4** percent. The **poverty rate** for those with less than a high school education was **29.4** percent in 2011.
- The state's **median household income** was **\$38,482** in 2011, down **\$962**. **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 indicator of how the middle class is faring. The decrease in **median household income** in 2011 was not statistically significant.

- Approximately, **272,287**, or **14.9 percent** of West Virginians—aged 18-64—were **uninsured** in 2011. This is an increase from the **14.6 percent** uninsured in 2010. West Virginia ranks **21st** among the 50 states in residents that lack health insurance.

“To combat poverty and help struggling working families make ends meet, state lawmakers have many tools at their disposal,” said Stuart Frazier, a policy analyst for the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. “This includes expanding Medicaid to cover 120,000 low-income families through the Affordable Care Act, creating a state Earned Income Tax Credit modeled after the federal EITC, investing in child care assistance, and raising the state minimum wage.”

In 2010, approximately 160,000 low-income West Virginians received the federal EITC. Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia have a state EITC. According to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute, if the minimum wage was raised from \$7.25 to \$9.80 per hour it would give an estimated 182,000 workers in West Virginia a raise while also generating approximately 800 new jobs over three years, \$300 million in additional wages, and \$200 million in state economic activity.

To avoid worsening poverty in West Virginia and across the country, Congress should take a balanced approach to deficit reduction that relies on responsible spending cuts and increasing revenue. Programs that have provided critical support to struggling families in poverty while keeping millions more out of poverty should be protected.

West Virginia Local/Metropolitan Area				
Poverty and Median Household Income, 2010-11				
	2010	2011	2010	2011
	Poverty Rate		Median Household Income	
Clarksburg, WV Micro Area	17.9%	16.7%	\$40,222	\$40,234
Charleston, WV Metro Area	14.6%	18.2%	\$44,847	\$40,990
Beckley, WV Micro Area	16.7%	15.3%	\$38,731	\$38,304
Parkersburg-Marietta-Vienna, WV-OH Metro Area	16.0%	16.6%	\$41,337	\$39,314
Bluefield, WV-VA Micro Area	20.4%	19.0%	\$33,059	\$34,032
Huntington-Ashland, WV-KY-OH Metro Area	21.7%	19.9%	\$37,049	\$36,894
Morgantown, WV Metro Area	20.9%	18.1%	\$44,802	\$43,722
Wheeling, WV-OH Metro Area	15.6%	14.4%	\$39,535	\$40,081
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey				