Seizing the Moment

STATE GOVERNMENTS and THE NEW COMMITMENT TO REDUCE POVERTY IN AMERICA

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A Joint Report from CLASP and Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity

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CLASP
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national nonprofit that works to improve the lives of low-income people. CLASP's mission is to improve the economic security, educational and workforce prospects, and family stability of low-income parents, children, and youth and to secure equal justice for all.

CLASP has played a key role in the re-emergence of poverty and opportunity in recent public discourse. In 2006 CLASP published "Targeting Poverty: Taking Aim at A Bull's Eye" which telescoped the potential for a new political climate toward those struggling to make ends meet. In addition to tracking developments around the nation, CLASP provides technical assistance related to raising the political profile of poverty and opportunity. Look for CLASP audio conferences and issue briefs on a range of topics such as: Poverty-Reduction Targets: What State Legislators Aim to Do; Poverty Ruler: Toward a Better Measurement Tool; Target Practice: Lessons from Targets that Hit at Air Quality and Homelessness; Developed Nation: What and Why Poverty Targets are Policy in Ireland, Canada, France, the UK and More.

Please contact Jodie Levin-Epstein at jodie@clasp.org for the schedule of audio conferences and to share developments in your community or state.

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spotlight on
POVERTY *and* OPPORTUNITY
FOUNDATIONS ASK PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WHAT THEY'LL DO FOR AMERICA

Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity: Foundations Ask Presidential Candidates What They'll Do for America is a new initiative supported by American foundations to develop sustained political will on the pressing issues of poverty and opportunity. *Spotlight* starts by engaging candidates in substantive discussions about poverty in our country and eliciting ideas and perspectives about what must be done. The *Spotlight* Web site offers the latest research and news from around the country and features compelling commentary from leading public figures and experts. Through ongoing forums, discussions, and outreach, *Spotlight* will seek to ensure that poverty and opportunity are on the national agenda long after the elections are over. For more information, visit www.spotlightonpoverty.org.

Table of Contents

1 Overview

- 4 WILL
- 6 TARGETS
- 9 STATE INITIATIVES SNAPSHOT

10 State-by-State Narratives

35 State Initiative Charts

- 36 OVERVIEW AND LINKS
- 37 CHECKLIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS
- 38 RECOMMENDATIONS DETAILED BY POLICY AREA

44 Endnotes

State Governments and the New Commitment to Reduce Poverty in America

Overview

By this time next year, the country will have a new president. Whether our next leader is a Republican, Democrat, or Independent, the change in leadership is an opportunity for us to reconsider the kind of nation we hope to be.

The next administration will determine whether, and to what extent, to make visible those who struggle to make ends meet in our changing economy. It is encouraging that candidates are offering policy proposals on how to tackle poverty. And it is helpful that these proposals are gaining attention and being tracked through efforts such as the foundation-led Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity (www.spotlightonpoverty.org), the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life[1] and The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law.[2]

Yet policy proposals, while essential, are not sufficient. Too often they get stuck on the page, achieving little. Fortunately, policymakers in a growing number of states have raised the political profile of economic opportunity for all. The trend has been fast-paced—most of the political attention has emerged in just the last two years. The new president should build upon this fresh political landscape.

State governments are bringing political attention to poverty and opportunity in many ways, including poverty-reduction targets that set a specific goal and timeline; commissions that conclude with recommendations for action; legislative caucuses that seek to foster both legislators' expertise and bipartisan solutions; and government-sponsored summits.

The trend includes city governments, too. A recent analysis of city efforts from the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families is a helpful guide for others looking to raise the profile of poverty and opportunity.[3] Last year, the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Task Force on Poverty issued a strategic set of priority recommendations.[4] And CLASP will soon issue a summary of recommendations from the three cities (New York, Providence, and Milwaukee) that most recently released task force reports.

State governments' political attention to poverty and opportunity is substantial, fast-paced, and growing:

- **12 states—nearly one in four—have established initiatives[5]**
- **10 states—one in five—established their initiatives in 2006 or 2007**
- **4 states already have initiative proposals pending this year[6]**

These state initiatives provide evidence of a political sea-change toward poverty and opportunity. States are seizing the moment and creating a new political climate. A concerted federal focus should follow. Our next president should give leadership, political capital, and priority attention to policies and programs that effectively help provide opportunity for all.

Reasons for the renewed attention to poverty and opportunity vary. They include:

- *Upward mobility, the theme of the American Dream, may be mere myth:* "Contrary to American beliefs about equality of opportunity, a child's economic position is heavily influenced by that of his or her parents. Forty-two percent of children born to parents in the bottom fifth of the income distribution remain in the bottom, while 39 percent born to parents in the top fifth remain at the top," according to the Economic Mobility Project. [7]

- *The dramatic gap between rich and poor has grown worrisome to the federal government:* Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke notes that unchecked growth in income inequality could threaten the nation's "dynamism" and that "the challenge for policy is… to spread economic opportunity as widely as possible" by promoting "policies that focus on education, job training, and skills and that facilitate job search and job mobility." [8]

- *A recession, a time when economic insecurity touches more lives, also increases the number who live in poverty:* Depending on its severity, that number would increase by between 4.7 and 10.4 million people by 2010. A recession would also increase the national poverty rate, now 12.3 percent, by an estimated 1.6 to 3.5 percentage points.[9]

If our nation's past is prologue, we can make great strides toward providing opportunity and reducing poverty. In recent decades, the national poverty rate has declined substantially: from 22.4 percent in 1959 to 12.3 percent in 2006.[10] So there has been much progress to celebrate.

But most of this was achieved by the 1970s; the country has been in basically the same place ever since.[11] Significantly, the U.S. stands second only to Mexico[12] as having the worst rate of relative poverty among the world's developed nations.[13] And many living above the federal poverty guideline—$21,200 a year for a family of four—also struggle.[14] Most experts agree that our poverty measure should be updated to more realistically account for new income streams (*e.g.,* the Earned Income Tax Credit) and common expenses (*e.g.*, child care).[15] Indeed, a number of the task forces giving political attention to poverty are also attuned to the value of revisiting how we measure it. By whatever measure, it is clear that too many in our rich nation are not thriving.

It is time to re-examine the kind of nation we want to be. In America today:

- *Medical costs, often hard to absorb, propel some children into foster care:* A state study found that one-quarter of its foster-care caseload was made up of children whose parents,

faced with unaffordable bills for child mental-health services, got the needed care by putting their child into the foster-care system, which provides Medicaid.[16]

- *Hunger, even with emergency response systems, persists:* Seventeen percent of people in need of emergency food assistance are not receiving the necessary help, according to a 2007 U.S. Conference of Mayors survey of cities.[17]

- *Shelter, when it is available, often consumes more than half a family's income:* Six million low-income households either pay more than half of their income for rent and utilities or live in severely substandard housing.[18]

- *Work, even full-time year-round work, can leave people in poverty:* A third of poor families with children include a *full-time, year-round worker*.[19] Three million *full-time* workers live below the poverty line; in the last several decades, the share of poor adults and youth who work full-time has grown by 50 percent.[20] Nearly 60 percent of families below 200 percent of poverty have a full-time, year-round worker.[21]

There are solutions. We can afford them. According to the Center for American Progress (CAP) report "From Poverty to Prosperity," poverty could be cut by more than 25 percent just by increasing the minimum wage, Earned Income Tax Credits, Child Tax Credits, and child care subsidies. CAP also urges additional steps that would cut poverty by 50 percent within a decade.

While reducing poverty costs money, *sustaining* it is very expensive. CAP estimates it costs the nation about half a *trillion* dollars each year to allow persistent childhood poverty to continue. There may be literal gates between today's poor and prosperous communities, but there is no way to lock out poverty from our national economy or our future.

Seizing the Moment provides new information in three areas:

Will: *evidence of growing political and public will*

Targets: *rationale for setting numerical goals and timelines*

State Initiatives: *snapshot of government developments*

This report details the state-government initiatives through a snapshot, narratives, and charts.

WILL

Political and public will to tackle poverty and opportunity has turned a new corner

For at least the last decade, most politicians have been content to keep their distance from issues around poverty, inequality, and mobility. Senator Tom Daschle tells a story about the late Senator Paul Wellstone's 1997 decision to tour the same poor communities Robert Kennedy visited 30 years earlier. One of Wellstone's staffers told him, "We don't talk about poverty."[22] The senator, a rare political figure, disregarded this advice and went forward with his tour.

The recent political rise of poverty and opportunity in states and cities demonstrates a dramatic shift. Other developments also signal that we've turned a corner.

Presidential candidates in both parties have made statements on poverty and opportunity.

- Republican John McCain stated that he "will make the eradication of poverty a top priority of the McCain Administration. A strong and vibrant America, one in which people can move up into the middle-class, put their kids through college, work hard and one day retire in dignity, is critical not only to our economic future but to the very security of our nation. As president, I will set aside the needs of the special interests to advance the interests of the American people, especially those 12 million children who deserve every opportunity to achieve the American Dream."[23]

- Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have poverty platforms. Clinton calls for a new Cabinet-level post focused on poverty and sets a goal of cutting child poverty in half by 2020 and ending child hunger by 2012.[24] Obama's includes a focus on concentrated urban poverty and calls for a White House Office on Urban Policy.[25] Both wrote articles for "War on Poverty," the inaugural issue of Stanford University's *Pathways* magazine.

A variety of opinion polls indicate majority support for tackling poverty in the campaign and for electing candidates who will do so. This extends to local elections.

- Fifty-eight percent of likely voters are more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who set a goal of cutting poverty in half within a decade. Of those, 69 percent would back such a candidate even if the poverty cut required significantly higher federal spending.[26]

- Fifty-four percent of Americans do not believe that "political candidates have spent an adequate amount of time discussing hunger and poverty issues." [27]

- Seventy-one percent of those polled about child poverty in four early primary states are more likely to vote for a presidential candidate whose "agenda on children included provid-

ing greater economic opportunities and resources to help lift…children and families out of poverty." [28]

- Seventy-six percent of those polled about *local* community issues said that when they are voting they "think about how well a candidate would help those struggling to make ends meet." [29]

Technical assistance and poverty campaigns by national organizations are multiplying.

- In 2007, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the National Conference of State Legislatures hosted a three-day institute to help state policymakers develop strategies to reduce child and family poverty. Teams, comprised of both executive and legislative branch officials, worked together to develop action plans for their state. Ten states—Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Vermont, and Washington—participated.

- Poverty-reduction targets, promoted by CLASP and others, are central to advocacy campaigns by a range of national organizations. (*See* Targets.)

- The Food Research and Action Center's *Campaign to End Childhood Hunger*, The Center for Community Change's *Campaign for Community Values*, The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law's *The State of Poverty Campaign*, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops' *Catholic Campaign for Human Development*, and the Community Action Network's *Rooting Out Poverty* are among a growing number of re-energized advocacy efforts.

Regional non-profit efforts that promote collaboration are developing.

- The Northwest Area Foundation funds Horizons, an 18-month community leadership development program delivered into small rural and Indian reservation communities by university extension and tribal colleges. The program aims to reduce poverty in eight mostly northwestern states (OR, WA, ID, MT, ND, SD, IA, and MN) through strengthened civic engagement and a collective decision to take action. Approximately 200 communities have participated since the program's full launch in 2006.

- A New England Region Poverty Consortium of child advocacy organizations in six states (CT, RI, MA, NH, VT, and ME) was launched in 2007. The consortium, which has support from Voices for America's Children, expects to identify common issues and to swap policy ideas and winning strategies.

- The YWCA Great Lakes Alliance Region has established anti-poverty policy advocacy as the primary focus for its 2008–2011 agenda. Nearly 60 YWCAs in the six-state region

(IL, IN, MI, MO, OH, and WI) will receive advocacy training and technical assistance and will participate in targeted issue campaigns that foster the reduction of poverty and increase economic justice, particularly for women and girls.

Media coverage of poverty and opportunity is increasing and may have political implications.

- In this presidential campaign cycle, print articles that touch on both domestic poverty and the election are 145 percent more frequent than in the last cycle. [30]

- Poverty coverage includes a range of themes, as illustrated by these Midwest papers in December 2007:

  - *Paradox exists between poverty, plenty*, Fond du Lac Reporter (WI)[31]
  - *Special report: Our hidden poor*, Chicago Tribune (IL)[32]
  - *We all lose when poverty grows*, Cincinnati Enquirer (OH)[33]
  - *Poverty is biggest threat to state children*, Detroit News (MI)[34]
  - *Poverty, taxes and community*, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette (IN)[35]

A call for increased attention to U.S. poverty and opportunity has moved inside a broader tent. Action is now urged by prominent conservatives.

- Bill Hybels, a national evangelical leader, asserts that many in his movement want to get beyond two or three traditional issues and "are interested in the poor, in racial reconciliation, in global poverty and AIDS, in the plight of women in the developing world."[36]

- Michael Gerson, a former speechwriter for President Bush, argues forcefully that "if Republicans run in future elections with a simplistic antigovernment message, ignoring the poor, the addicted, and children at risk, they will lose, and they will deserve to lose."[37]

- Douglas MacKinnon, a writer for Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, argues that both parties should give the poor more respect and a "place at the table," most notably a direct voice at Congressional hearings.[38]

TARGETS

Poverty-reduction targets—numerical goals and timelines—are important policy tools

A target consists of a set of choices, including: population (*e.g.,* all individuals, only children, only the persistently poor), area (*e.g.,* the state, a city, some wards), numerical goal (*e.g.,* cut poverty by 25 percent, 50 percent, or more), and timeline (*e.g,*. 10, 20, or 30 years). Further, the measure of poverty should be

selected (*e.g.,* the current federal poverty line, some adaptation), as should the agency responsible for oversight and reporting. These decisions can make the target an invaluable policy tool.

To be useful, however, a poverty target needs to be taken out of the policy toolbox and sharpened through ongoing attention. Periodic progress reports are key. In addition, neither policy leaders nor the public should shy away from the possibility that targets may not always be met. There is value in a mid-course correction when something is not working or when a better policy idea becomes evident.

Targets offer four broad advantages. They are:

- **Shared.** Targets establish a shared acknowledgement that current poverty rates are unacceptable and a shared vision around the need for solutions. They create both an explicit goal and a timeline to give this vision shared urgency and priority.

- **Simple.** Targets are simple to understand, allowing the vision to be readily grasped, not just by the policymakers who create it but also by the agency officials who implement it, the media that cover it, and the community that wants something done. A target's simplicity also means that everyone can appreciate reports on how much progress is or is not being made.

- **Silo-busting.** "Shared" and "simple" targets foster interagency cooperation and break down program "silos"—because a target is not directed at a single program but instead challenges the whole government to consider what can be done. In the U.K., officials assert that this has been an unexpected benefit of their target to eliminate child poverty by 2020. The target's ability to bust silos was also noted by the then-commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Social Services (DSS) when it adopted a specific poverty target—because DSS was no longer tackling child poverty alone.

- **Solution-building.** Targets provide a shared vision; they do not delineate how the targets should be met. Prioritizing, funding, implementing, and adapting solutions over time requires thoughtful and ongoing deliberations. If a policy proposal is rejected when a target is in place, those rejecting it have to generate another of equal anticipated benefit. A target propels a focus on ways to achieve the goal.

In Congress and in a growing number of national organizations, a national poverty-reduction target is on the agenda.

As the campaign theme of Catholic Charities USA notes, an effective target could "Cut Poverty in Half; Make the Nation Whole."

Some of the national organizations calling for a poverty-reduction target focus on child poverty, while others focus on overall poverty. Each calls for cutting poverty at least in half, and most have a 10-year time frame.

The organizations that promote a target that would cut *child* poverty in half include:

- Congressional Black Caucus Foundation
- Christian Churches Together
- Sojourners

National groups that support a target that would cut *overall* poverty in half include:

- Catholic Charities USA
- Bread for the World
- Center for American Progress
- Coalition on Human Needs Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

In the U.S. House of Representatives, a Sense of Congress resolution passed on January 22, 2008; which called for a national goal to cut poverty in half over the next 10 years. By communicating the "sense" of Congress, this measure represents an initial Congressional step toward a target set through law.

In March, the Progressive Caucus in the House introduced an alternative budget for 2009–2018 that would renew the federal commitment to fully redress the consequences of Hurricane Katrina and would provide funds to cut the poverty rate in America by 50 percent during the next decade. To meet the target, the "Anti-Poverty and Opportunity Initiative" would provide $73.5 billion in its first year for a variety of efforts, including increases in funding for decent affordable housing, anti-hunger programs, and quality child care. In addition, a block grant would be available to states to eliminate deep poverty among children; targeted funding would be available to address disability. The alternative budget was never expected to pass the House; nevertheless, on March 13, it secured nearly 100 votes.[39]

STATE INITIATIVES SNAPSHOT

"Poverty has quietly become the most important question of our time."

Ismael Ahmed, Director
Michigan Department of Human Services[40]

The political profile of poverty and opportunity is rising quickly in state governments. These highlights and the subsequent state-by-state narratives and charts seek to capture a variety of ways that the issue of those struggling to survive is gaining attention in the states.

12 state governments
have a commission, poverty-reduction target, legislators' caucus, or a scheduled poverty summit.
AL, CO, CT, DC, DE, IA, MI, MN, OR, RI, VT, WA

- **8 commissions**
  AL, CT, DC, DE, MN, RI, VT, WA
- **2 new legislative caucuses**
  CO, IA
- **1 scheduled state summit**
  MI
- **1 target; independent of initiative**
  OR

5 poverty-reduction targets
CT, DE, MN, OR, VT

4 recommendations issued
AL, CT, IA, WA

4 initiatives pending
AL, IL, LA, ME

State-by-State Narratives

ALABAMA

Initiative: House Task Force on Poverty (2007).
A pending bill would establish a permanent commission on the Reduction of Poverty (2008).

In early 2008, the Alabama House Task Force on Poverty issued its report. While its work is done, a pending bill would establish a permanent legislative commission.

The 14-person House Task Force was made up of a bipartisan group of legislators, along with representatives of state anti-poverty nonprofits. It was chaired by Representative Patricia Todd (D-Birmingham), a tireless anti-poverty advocate whose earlier efforts to form a joint House and Senate task force died in the Senate.[41] Starting in October 2007, the group held three meetings that brought together more than 100 people and 34 organizations.

According to Rep. Todd, the task force's overarching goal was to develop "realistic legislative priorities."[42] Four subcommittees (human/social capital, housing and community development, education and workforce development, and tax/regulatory) identified the top issues, and the task force agreed that individual members would introduce related legislation in 2008.[43] The priorities included:

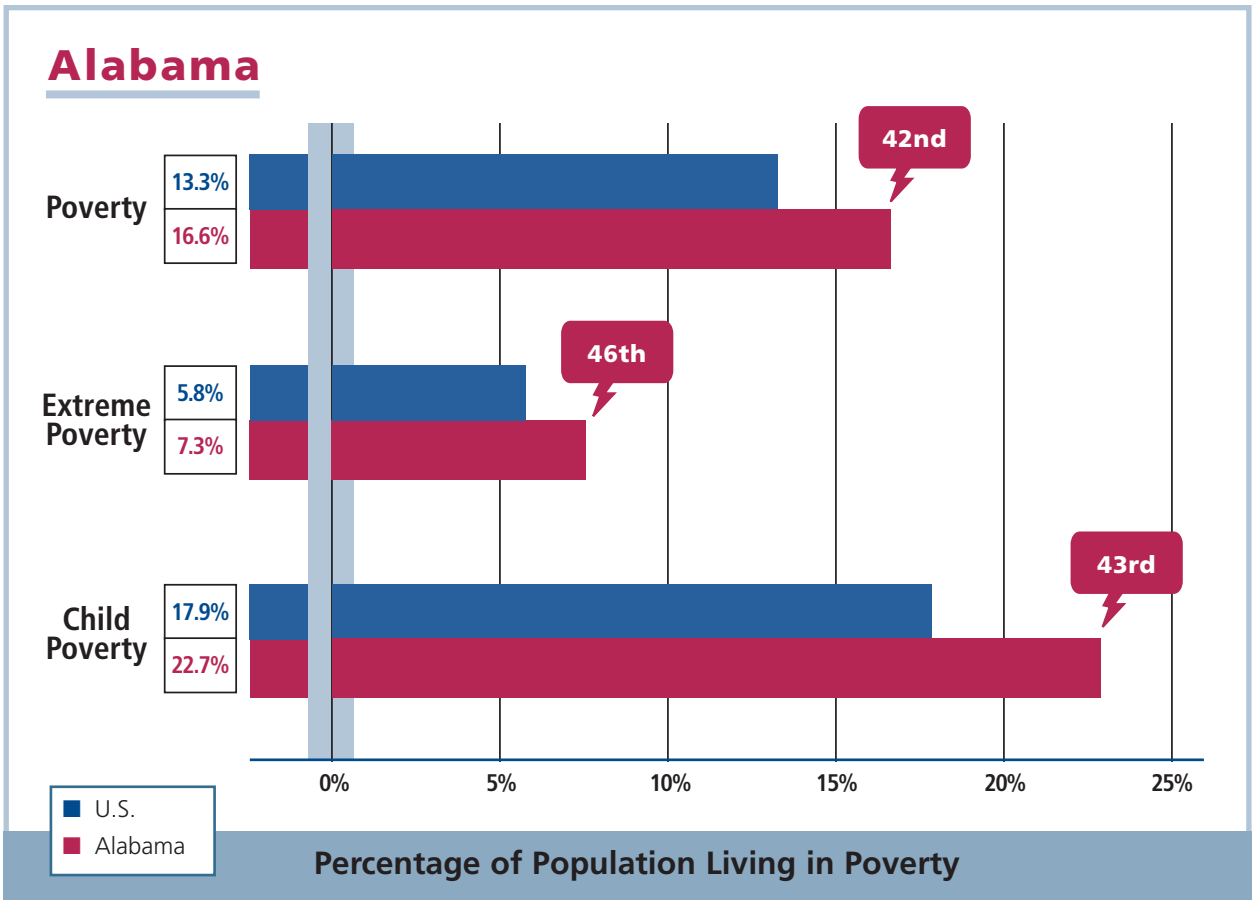
- Requiring businesses that receive economic incentives to pay a wage equal to the area median-income level,
- Providing additional funds to Head Start until there is no waiting list,
- Eliminating sales tax on groceries and food, and
- Raising the income-tax threshold to the poverty level.

Task force members made a variety of observations about their mission. A legislator from one of Alabama's poorest counties asserted that "people do get lost and think they can't do better,"[44] and the Republican vice-chairman observed that investment in education is a key solution, because "one of the biggest reasons people stay in poverty is ignorance."[45]

If the permanent commission were established, it would meet at least quarterly and provide the legislature with an annual assessment of current programs, along with proposed policies to address poverty.

"The Task Force has had overwhelming support for principles in both parties," Rep. Todd observed. "Our challenge is that many things we strive for will cost money. With a general budget that is being

cut, proposals that cost money are not going to fly, so we have to get creative—and we will. The pending commission could prove important as a focal point for bringing together disparate perspectives on how to meet this challenge. I am hopeful that Alabama, which has lots of room for improvement, will be able to move forward in the years ahead."[46]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

COLORADO

Initiative: Common Good Caucus (2007).

A new bipartisan, bicameral legislative forum has been created to bring together "legislators interested in addressing poverty through public-policy and private-sector solutions that promote self-sufficiency, family well-being, community development, and the common good." [47]

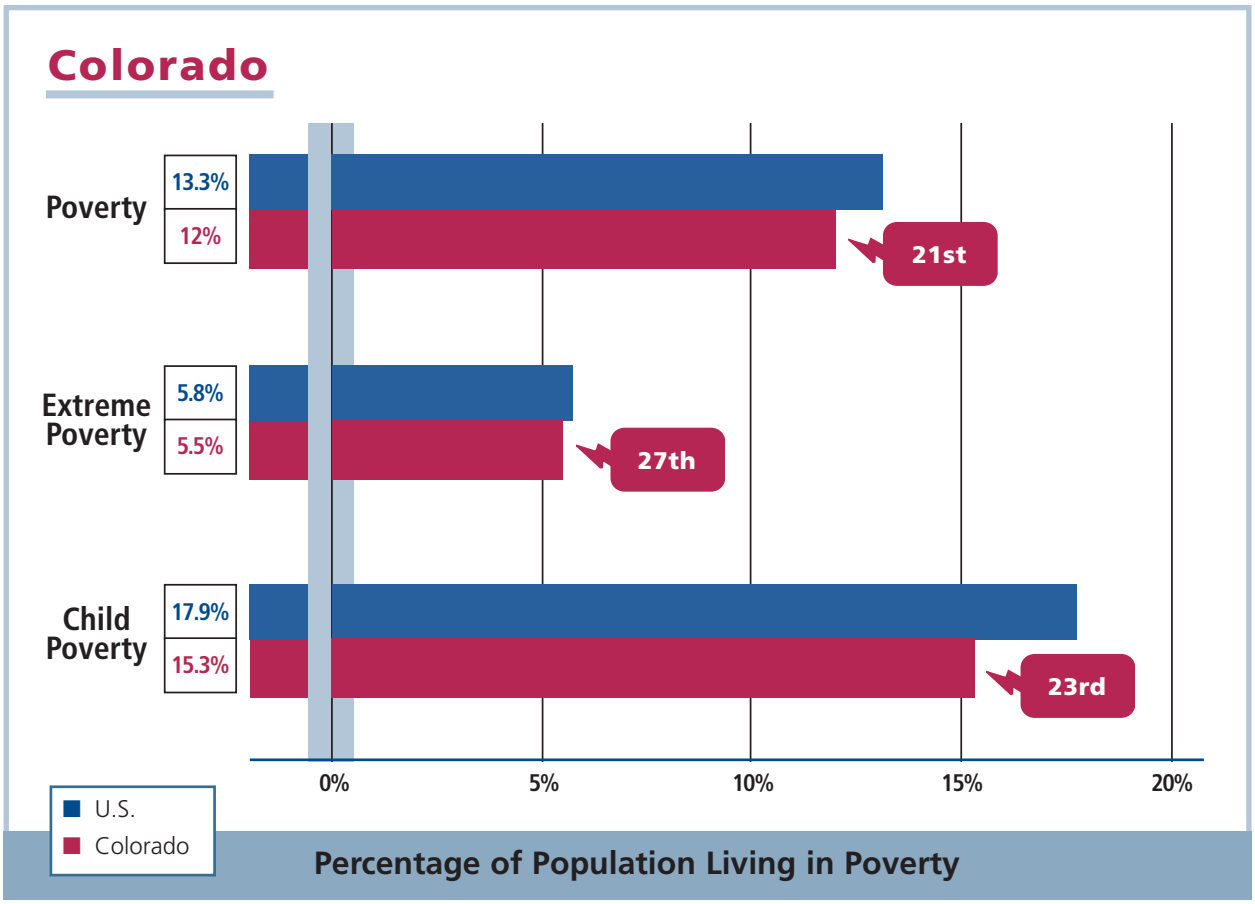
Spearheaded by Representative John Kefalas (D-Ft. Collins), the Common Good Caucus, in collaboration with the "Paycheck Away" Coalition,[48] participated in a statewide series of community forums.

Beginning in September 2007, the group held town hall meetings "to hear people's stories about making ends meet and to engage legislators and citizens in the solutions."[49] A DVD of the "Paycheck Away" statewide tour was then delivered to every member of the state legislature.

At a December 2007 caucus meeting, the governor's office presented an anti-poverty budget request, which included increases of $213.5 million for programs targeted at those living on a shoestring—programs such as workforce centers, higher education, and health care.

The caucus's search for solutions is guided by an appreciation that poverty impacts "educational outcomes, workforce training, and retention" and has "social and economic costs on society as a whole," Rep. Kefalas said. Going forward, one of the caucus's goals will be developing a legislative agenda for the 2009 session, and Rep. Kefalas believes this should focus on health-care reform and access to early childhood and higher education. "The Common Good Caucus will have achieved a lot if we can get a law to cut poverty in half, along with specific strategies to accomplish the goal," he said.[50]

Long term, the legislators of the Common Good Caucus will strive to develop expertise on poverty issues and to become a cohesive caucus to which colleagues can turn. "Legislators need to both learn the subject matter and learn to trust each other. The caucus is a place where both can happen," Rep. Kefalas said.[51]



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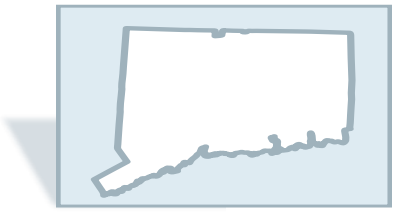
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.



CONNECTICUT

Initiative: A target to cut child poverty in half by 2014 is overseen by the Child Poverty and Prevention Council (2004).

In 2004, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to enact a law setting a poverty target. Spurred by a small group of legislators, the target has brought disparate state agencies together to work toward a common goal.

While the United Kingdom had announced a similar effort five years earlier, the Connecticut initiative was homegrown. Its impetus came from a brainstorming session by a handful of legislators wanting to gain real political focus around child poverty, according to Elaine Zimmerman, executive director of the Connecticut Commission on Children. Zimmerman noted that the target "really energized us all; it was about accountability that came as a package with a vision."[52]

The measure was signed into law in 2004 by Governor John G. Rowland (R), and in 2006, under Governor Jodi Rell (R), the Child Poverty Council and the state's Prevention Council merged into the Child Poverty and Prevention Council.

Pat Wilson-Coker, who was director of the Department of Social Services when the law went into effect, observed that a target "brings a lot of people to the table. When the state takes on a public policy like ending child poverty or just reducing it by half, all of the various departments within the state…have a role."[53]

The council reports annually on progress toward the goal of cutting child poverty in half; it focuses on the governor's budget, as well as on poverty and prevention reports from other state agencies. The council also advises the governor and legislature on ways to realign the state's budget to ensure that it is compatible with reducing child poverty.

One of the challenges the council faced early on was that 67 recommendations, too many to take on at once, were included in the first report.

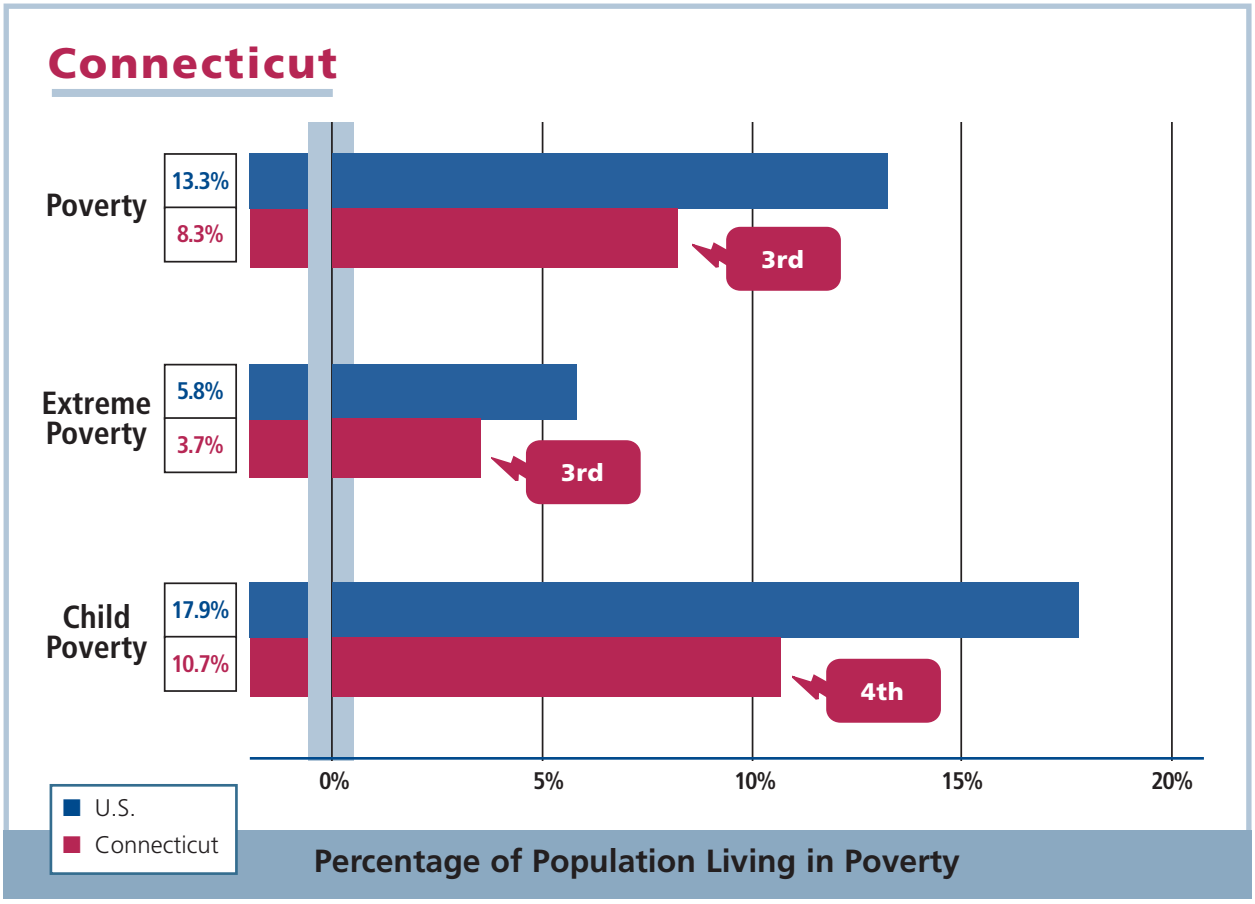
To help establish priorities, the council recently invited a nonpartisan panel of experts to review the 67 recommendations and offer suggestions. In December, the experts picked 13 specific priorities that "have a sufficiently strong evidence base to support their potential effectiveness in reducing child poverty."[54] Their criteria also included cost-effectiveness and the timeframe for impact. The priorities included income supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and child-care subsidies made available to all low-income families at least up to 200 percent of poverty. They also included education investments in areas such as teacher quality and early childhood and postsecondary education, as well as family-structure supports (*e.g.*, programs related to teen pregnancy prevention).[55]

The panel also noted that the current federal poverty measure is inadequate, urging the council to utilize methods proposed by the National Academy of Sciences in 1995 and other measures, such as student progress and health status. The council's progress reports track the status of child poverty using both 100 and 200 percent of poverty.

The Child Poverty and Prevention Council's January 2008 progress report identifies additional steps it plans to take toward refining the effort, such as economic modeling that will allow the state to forecast which of the alternative recommendations would result in a 25- to 30-percent reduction in child poverty.[56] In addition, the General Assembly's Human Services Committee raised several bills in March that address priorities recommended by the expert panel.[57]

The focus on the anticipated impact of alternative policies on child poverty is particularly salient for Connecticut politics, where proposals for a refundable state EITC have, to date, been rejected by the governor, whose budget director chairs the council. Because the EITC provides income for working families, it can bring immediate improvements to economic well-being.

Business leaders have increasingly been speaking out about the need to address poverty. The most recent KIDS COUNT report by the Connecticut Association for Human Services[58] led Thomas Phillips, president of Capital Workforce Partners, to note that poverty has ripple effects throughout the community and its workforce. "This is no longer a social-only discussion; this is now an economic-competitiveness discussion," Phillips said. Liberty Bank President Chandler Howard observed, "Every business wants to operate in a healthy economy. When you have a segment of the community mired in poverty, it pulls everyone down."[59]



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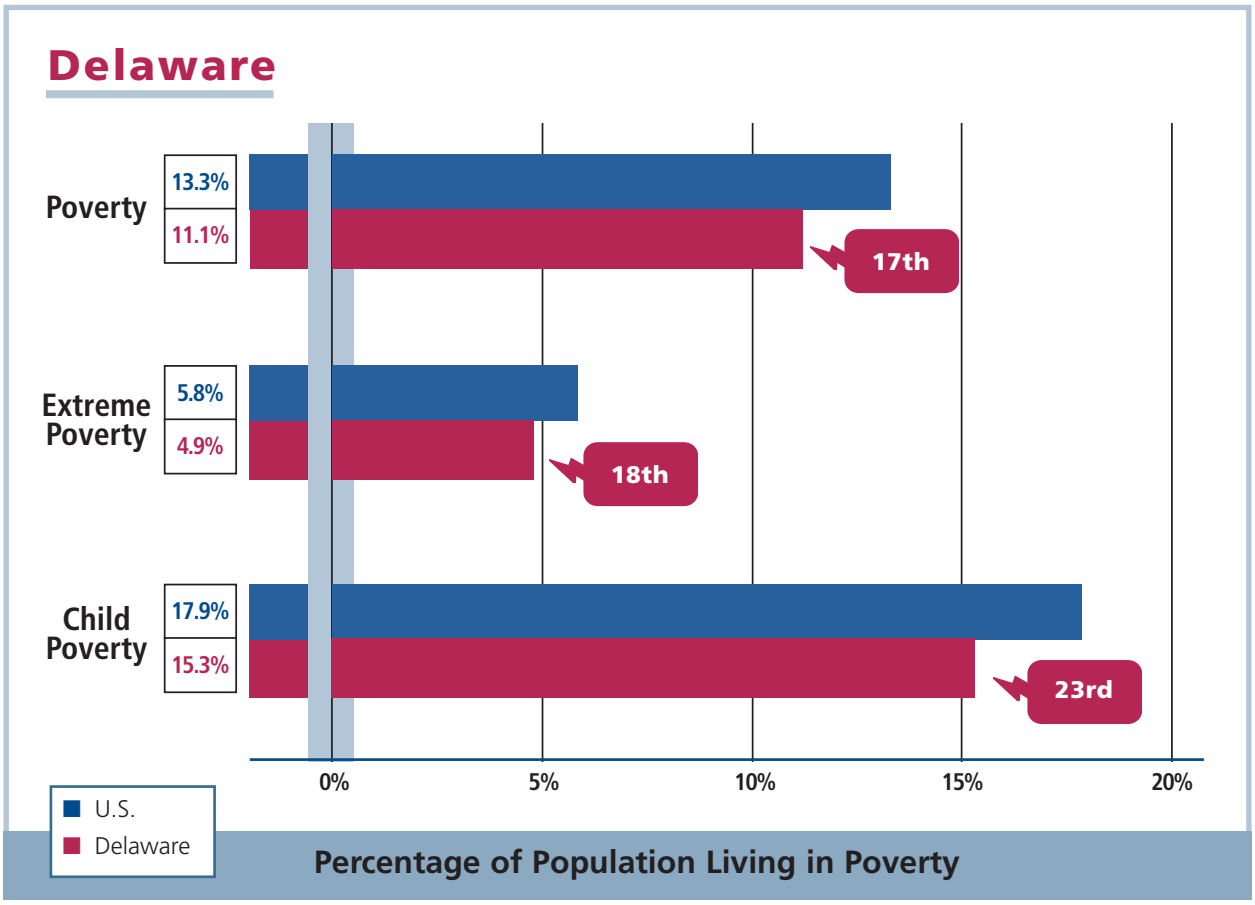


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

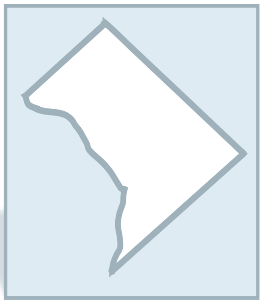
DELAWARE

Initiative: A target to cut child poverty in half by 2017 was established by Executive Order and is overseen by the Child Poverty Task Force (2007).

Governor Ruth Ann Minner (D) issued an executive order in August 2007 to establish the Child Poverty Task Force.[60] This followed on the heels of a legislative session that ended before a bill to legislate a poverty target could gain full consideration. That legislation was sponsored by Representative Terry Schooley (D-Newark), also the director of KIDS COUNT in Delaware, who now chairs the task force.

The 25-member task force plans to spend 2008 collecting information from experts, hearing from communities, and determining its recommendations. The work plan for this one-year planning phase includes three work teams focused on data and research, public outreach, and agency inventory. One of the task force's first meetings included a presentation from the Vermont state senator who serves as co-chair of the Vermont Child Poverty Council. Along with its public meetings, the task force plans to operate a Web site to facilitate public access to its deliberations and findings.

"There has been incredible buy-in from the agency heads and others who have come to the Task Force meetings," said Schooley. "The target has helped galvanize lots of us who have long worked on these issues. We want to recognize what we have done right and build upon that with a few key priorities. To get the job done, our plan will include action steps designed to sustain both public interest and political will over the next decade."[61] The plan is due to the governor by August 2008.



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Initiative: D.C. Poverty Commission (2006).

The Commission on Poverty was established by the City Council in June 2006 "to evaluate programs designed to help District residents break the cycle of poverty; to make recommendations to improve the economic, educational, healthcare, and housing status of District residents living in poverty; and to focus on efforts aimed at reducing the rates of concentrated poverty and childhood poverty in the District."[62] The commission was originally scheduled to sunset in 2008, but is expected to be extended.

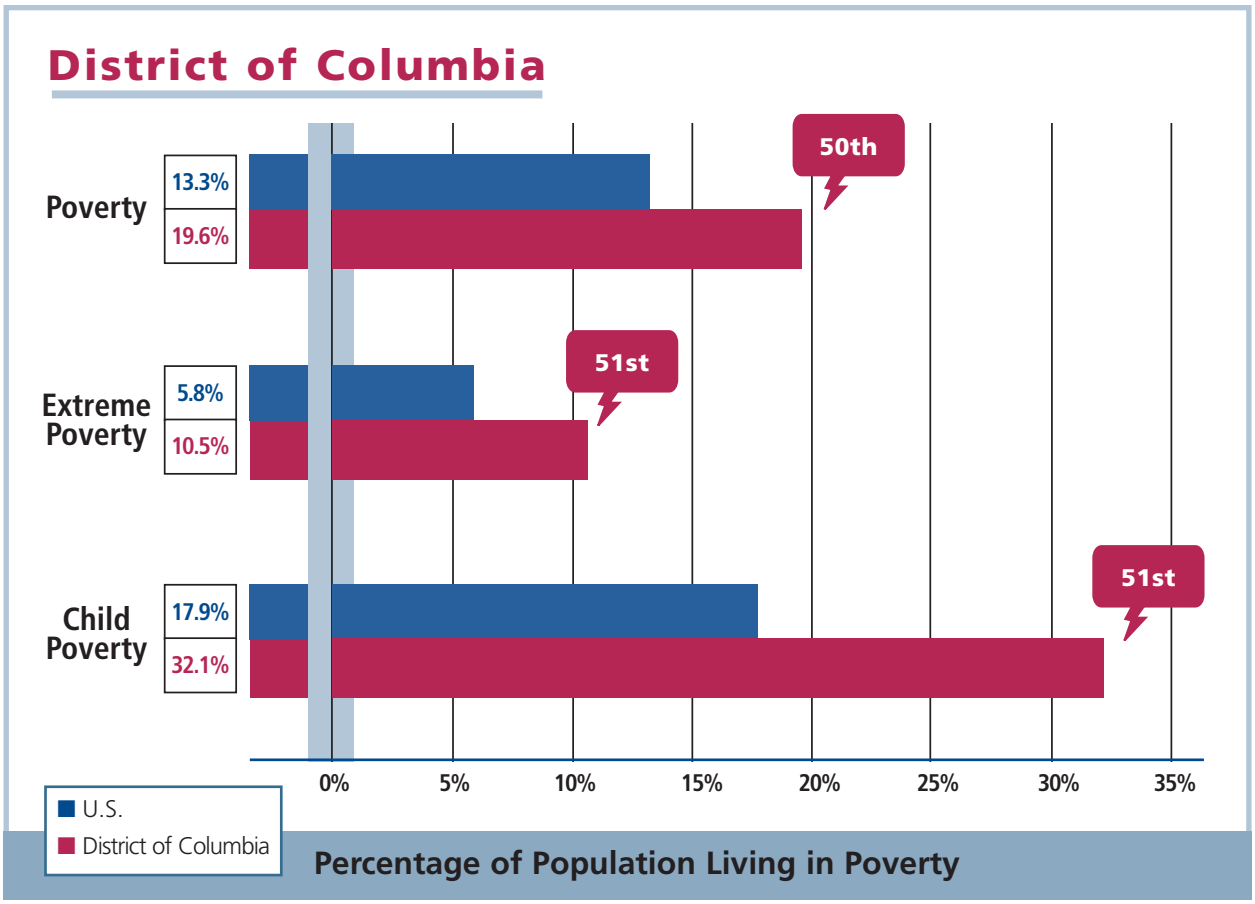
After a 2003 Brookings Institution study found that concentrated poverty (*i.e.*, more than 40 percent of the people in a given community fall below the poverty line) had risen significantly in the District, discussions began to circle around the creation of the D.C. Commission on Poverty, which was to focus on individuals who had lived below poverty at some point within the previous two years.[63]

A 2005 commission bill was successfully shepherded by then-councilmember, now Mayor Adrian Fenty,[64] who acknowledged the "need to bridge the gap between rich and poor" and noted that the city's leaders were "ready to implement solid programs for poor and working-class people."[65]

Advocates are stressing that poverty is more than a moral issue. The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute's executive director observed, "Much of the city's biggest budget expenses—public safety, foster care, special education—is tied at least in part to our high poverty rate."[66]

More than a year after its creation, the commission is not yet fully staffed. The mayor has submitted nominees for nine of the 21 commissioners; the commission has yet to meet. But it is anticipated that both staffing and seating of commissioners will soon take place and the 2008 sunset date will be extended.

In the meantime, poverty has grabbed the current D.C. council's attention. At a two-day Roundtable on Poverty in January 2008, more than 120 people signed up to testify in front of council members.[67] In a packed hearing room, women suffering from domestic violence, fathers who couldn't find living-wage work, disabled and homeless veterans fighting to keep their shelters open, and elderly individuals whose landlords were taking advantage of their poverty shared their personal tragedies and pleaded for help. Advocates backed up these testimonies with striking figures and similar calls for action.



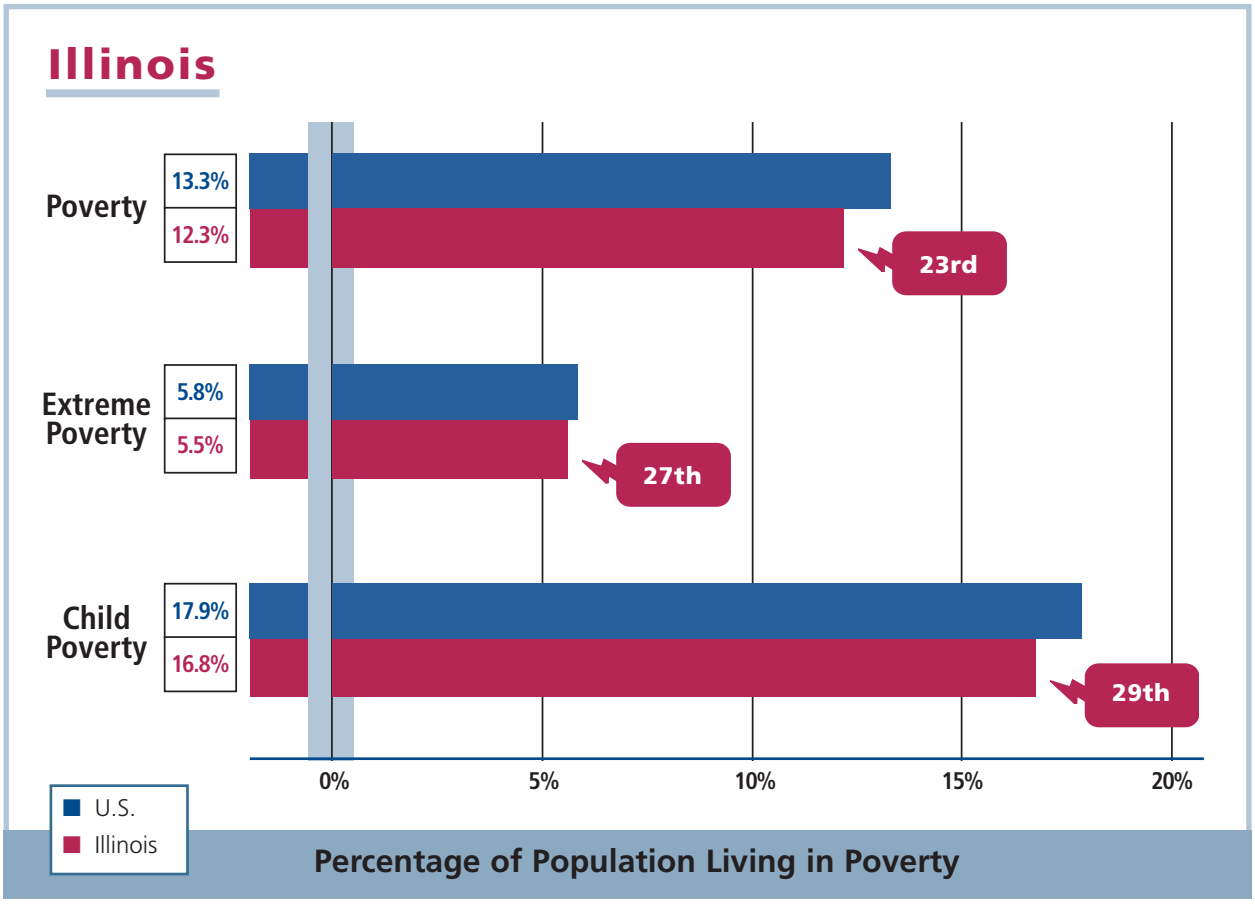
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

The next month, Council-member Marion Barry, the roundtable's sponsor, held a National Poverty Summit aimed at "producing concrete policy and budget recommendations for the FY 09 cycle."[68] Council Chairman Vincent Gray underscored the value of summits and the renewed conversation around poverty, calling it "arguably the most important issue we face in the District. We've lived with the problem so long, you can become callous. We need this catalyst."[69]

Illinois

Initiative: A pending bill would set a target to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015, to be overseen by a commission (2008).

The preamble to the Illinois constitution names the elimination of poverty as a fundamental goal of the state government. A pending bill, introduced in early 2008, would set a target to cut extreme poverty—defined as living below 50 percent of the poverty line—in half by 2015.[70] A Commission on Poverty Elimination would be charged with developing a comprehensive plan "consistent with international human-rights standards."



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

The House unanimously approved the bill on April 9th, the governor is on record in support, and the Senate is next to act.

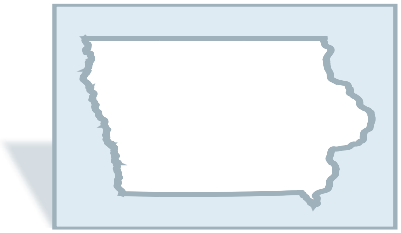
The bill's House sponsor, Representative Karen A. Yarbrough (D-Maywood), asserts, "Freedom from poverty is a human right, and we as a state have the capacity to ensure our citizens do not live in such hunger and hardship. People who are working but still living in poverty are an important part of our economy. This commission will help provide the economic stimulus so these hardworking Illinoisans can not just get by, but get ahead."[71]

The commission's strategic plan is to offer specific policy and fiscal recommendations, each of which will include an implementation timeline and measures for the actual or potential impact. The commission also has the discretion to review and comment on existing and proposed policy that could have an impact on poverty in the state.

The legislation is a key goal of a statewide advocacy effort, the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign. The campaign is a project of the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, which held 20 forums across Illinois in 2007[72] and has released a report of conversations with more than 700 people across the state.[73] As the Senate sponsor, Senator Michael Frerichs (D-Champaign), observed, "People from

every legislative district across the state have come together with a renewed passion to tackle poverty in Illinois. This is not a partisan issue. And it's not solely an urban, rural, or suburban issue. It's a people issue. We must remove the roadblocks to opportunity so more people can achieve economic stability."[74]

The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign is also urging the governor to include $450,000 in the next budget to fund the commission's work.



Iowa

Initiative: Successful Families Caucus (2007).

The newly formed Successful Families Caucus aims to "chang[e] the way Iowa legislators think about poverty, moving the discussion beyond just the traditional human services committee work. Just as poverty touches every community in Iowa, so must solutions be generated and coordinated across all committees in the General Assembly." [75]

It all started with a conversation among a bipartisan group of just four legislators. By the time the caucus formally launched in February 2007, support from the Northwest Area Foundation enabled the group to expand and develop initiatives. One-fifth of the General Assembly is now part of the caucus, which gets staffing assistance through the State Public Policy Group, a consulting firm.

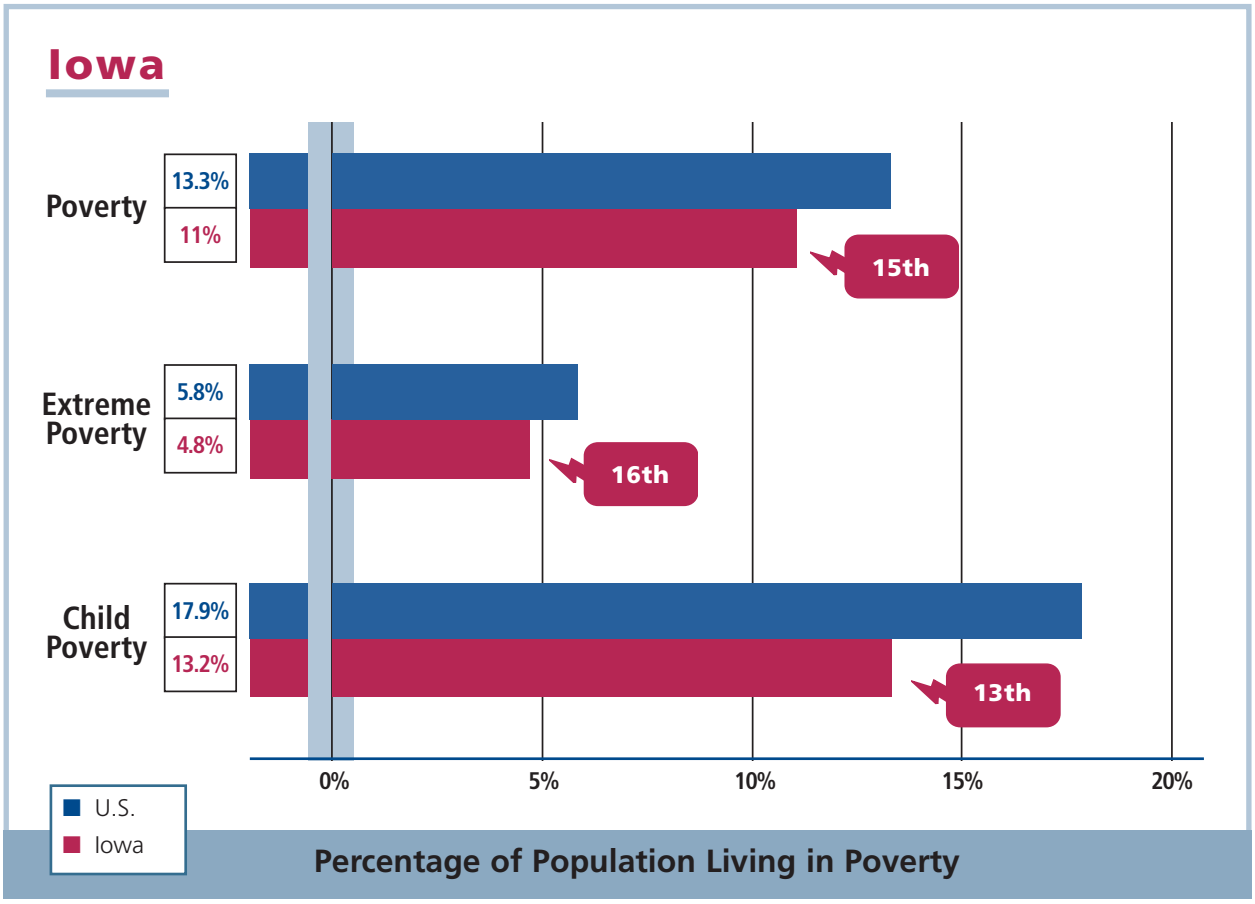
The top three goals of the caucus are:[76]

- To create and sustain a bipartisan and constructive environment in the General Assembly to discuss issues and policy solutions for Iowa's poorest families and communities.
- To explore atypical and innovative poverty-reduction solutions and initiatives that could serve as models for communities in Iowa.
- To create a state policy environment in which to engage families, communities, and institutions in developing comprehensive policy solutions for Iowa's struggling communities and families.

The caucus has identified several key legislative priority areas for the 2008 session:[77]

- *Health care.* Covering all children in the state through Medicaid, SCHIP, or private insurance.
- *Workforce.* Improving outreach and collaboration among state agencies and improving community-level partnerships with organizations such as local social services agencies, health clinics, and schools to improve information-sharing and referrals to workforce services.
- *Education.* Requiring schools to provide comprehensive financial literacy for K-12.
- *Financial consumer protection.*
- *Asset development.* Increasing the EITC from 7 to 10 percent of the federal level.

The caucus can turn to a variety of nonprofit organizations in the state for ideas and data on alternative approaches to addressing poverty. For example, in 2006, Iowa's Child and Family Policy Center issued



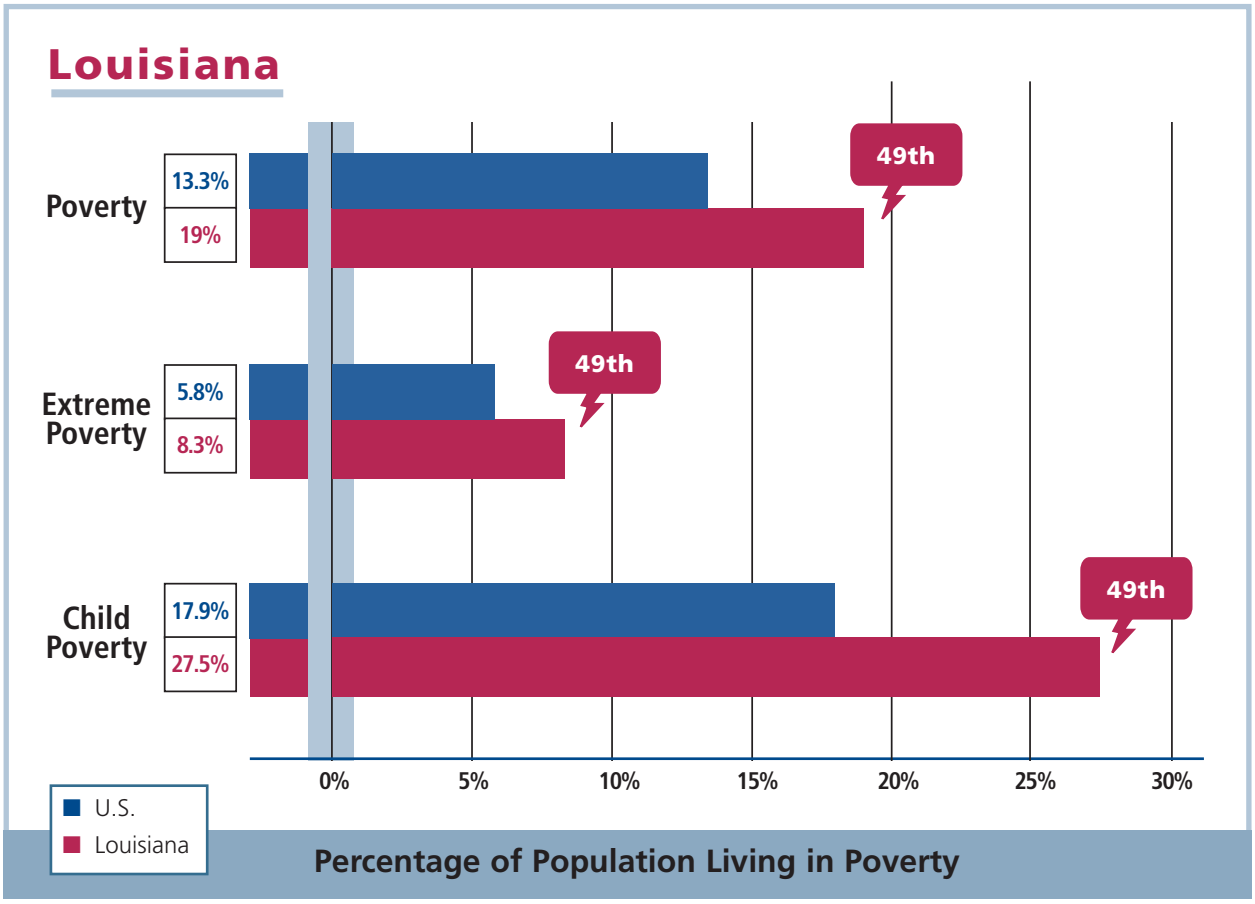
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

a report, *The Challenges of Getting By and Getting Ahead*, and it now tracks how the legislature addresses programs and policies in five areas:[78]

- making work pay;
- providing needed work supports;
- investing in education, skill development, and entrepreneurship;
- promoting savings and addressing debt; and
- welcoming new workers.

An effective caucus provides an intangible value. "A caucus just doesn't happen," one state senator explained. "A caucus develops when you make the time and space for relationships to grow across parties, across chambers, and across committees." [79]

As Chairman and Representative McKinley Bailey (D–Webster City) noted, "This caucus provides a way to make a meaningful impact in a bipartisan way for Iowa families that need opportunities to improve their lives. The initial priorities identified by the Successful Families Caucus are focused on making this happen by proposing real solutions to real problems."[80]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

Louisiana

Initiative: A pending bill would cut child poverty in half by 2018 and would establish a Child Poverty Prevention Fund. The Child Poverty Prevention Council would implement the effort (2008).

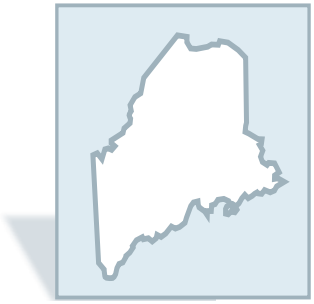
The pending bill would create a poverty council with the mission of disbursing grants directly to parishes to meet the goal of halving child poverty within a decade. Louisiana's Child Poverty Council would be created within the state's Department of Social Services. These features would distinguish the council as, to date, other states' councils tend to be housed outside of a state agency and have a primarily advisory role.

Sponsored by business-owner and chairman of the Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee, Senator Ben Nevers (D-Bogalusa), the measure is expected to be considered in the 2008 regular session, sometime after March 31. The council would be comprised of representatives from six state departments: Social Services, Economic Development, Revenue, Education, Labor, and the Workforce

Commission. In pursuing its stated purpose of cutting child poverty in half, the council would be expected to prioritize support for parishes with the highest child poverty rates.

The pending bill would also create a "Child Poverty Prevention Fund." The source of its monies would be broad and could include funding from state appropriations, federal funds, public or private donations, and gifts from individuals. The council would be charged with growing the fund.

Adren Wilson, assistant secretary of the Department of Social Services, notes, "This bill seeks to push us hard and fast to cut child poverty and that is appropriate. We know that poverty is too expensive. There are the obvious remediation and social-service costs. But also of concern is what's less apparent—the more poverty we sustain, the more we lose out on the talents of those who are poor and the more likely those who are well-off will leave our state. The department stands ready to take on this task."[81]



Maine

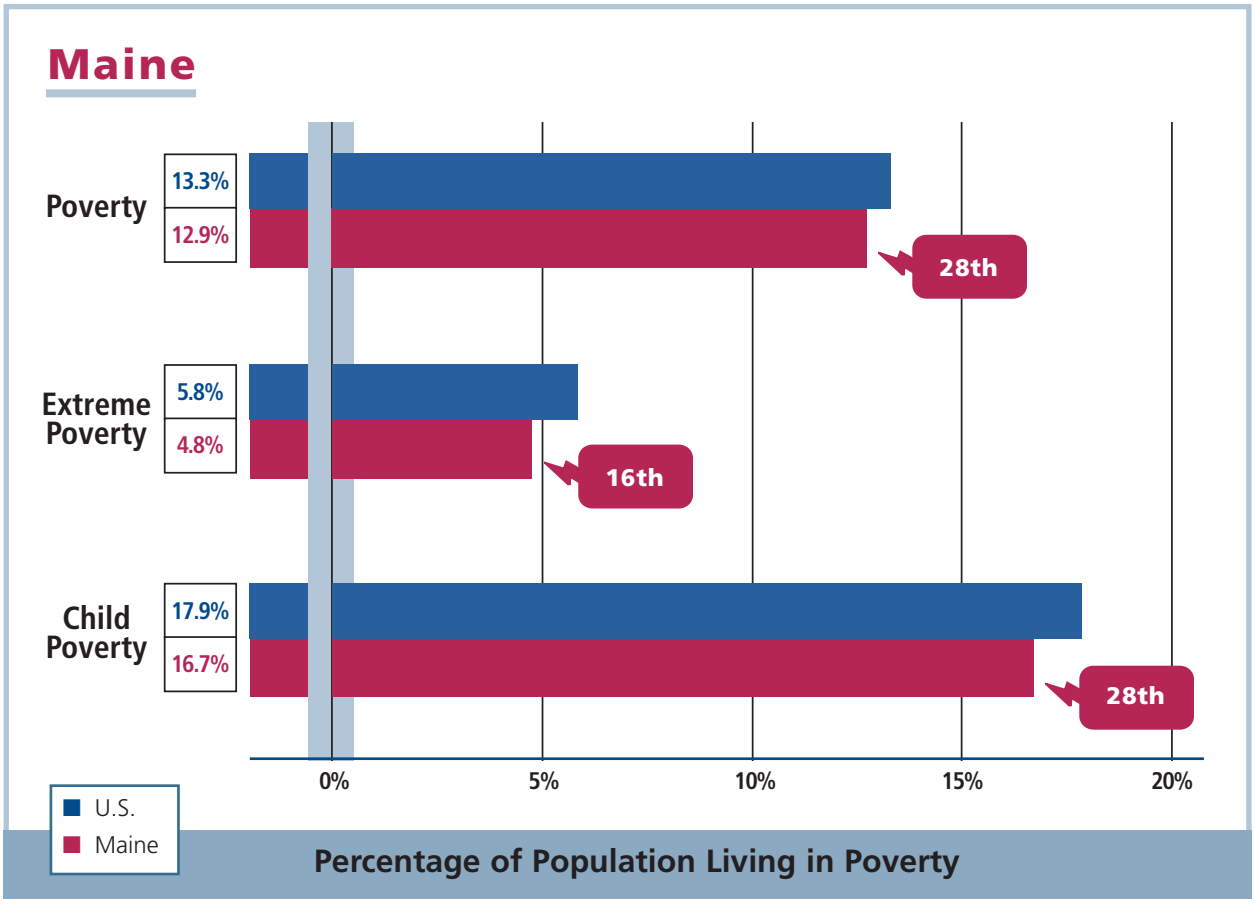
Initiative: A pending bill calls for a target to cut overall poverty to be set by a Council on Poverty and Economic Security (2007).

In 2007, a bill to establish the Maine Council on Poverty and Economic Security was introduced by the president of the Senate. A measure passed unanimously in committee in March 2008.[82] The council is intended to "to advise the governor on ending poverty and providing economic security to disadvantaged citizens in the State." The council is expected to make recommendations to the governor every two years.

The bill's sponsor, Senate President Beth Edmonds (D-Freeport), may ask the committee to amend the bill to include a provision instructing the council to establish measurable benchmarks for the elimination of poverty in Maine. The council would set percentage reductions in the number of people living in or near poverty in the next five, 10, and 20 years.

Media coverage of poverty in Maine gained prominence in 2007 through a front-page, seven-part series in the *Kennebec Journal*. Later that year, the First Annual Symposium on Poverty and Economic Security was sponsored by a number of statewide advocacy organizations. The symposium identified a range of concerns, among them the implications of poverty on state productivity.

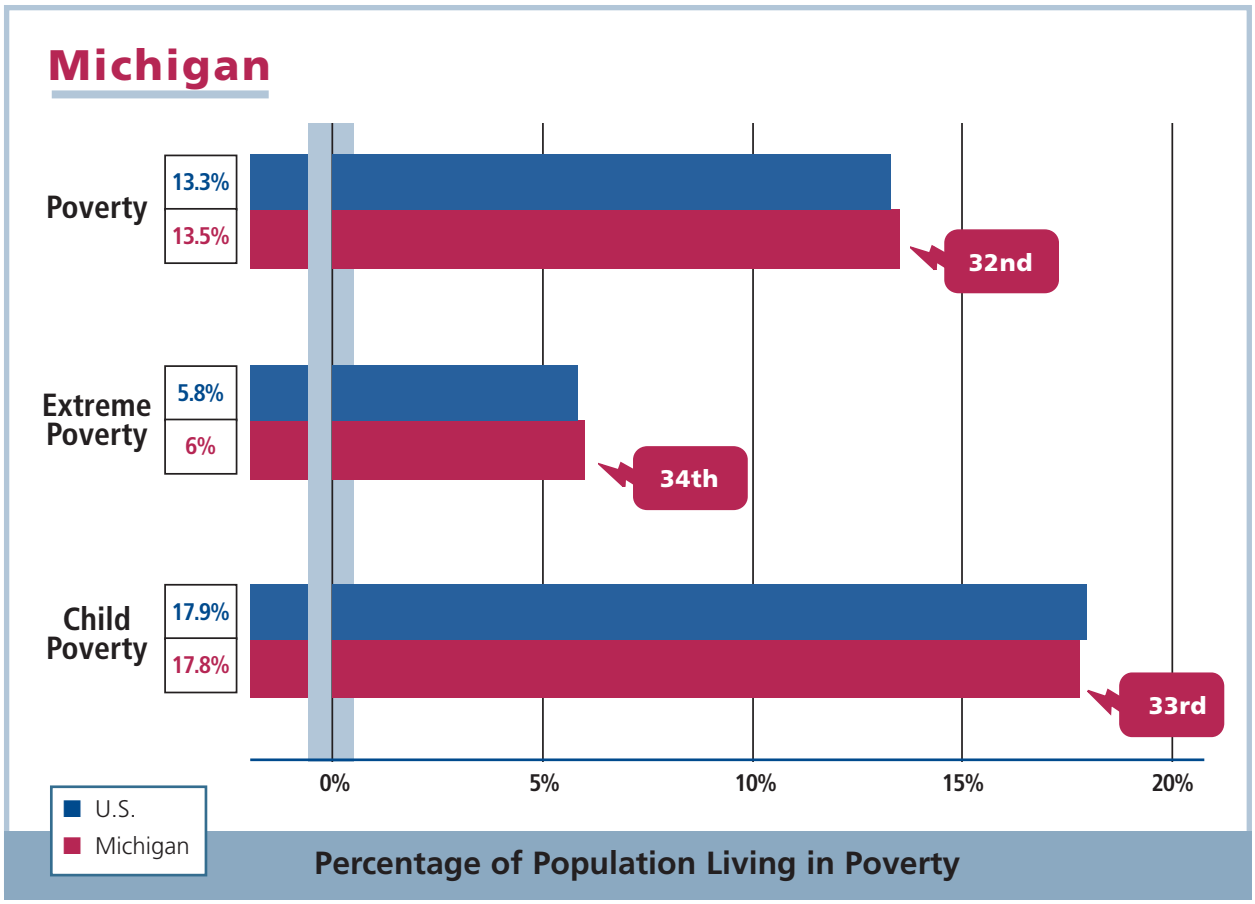
Each year, Maine loses about $260 million in health care, metals manufacturing, and construction alone due to jobs that go unfilled for lack of qualified candidates. Most of these jobs—as a drywall installer, plumber, electrician, lab technician, nurse, dietician, or machinist—require a two-year degree.[83] The Maine-specific analysis demonstrated that investments in education could improve not only individual incomes but also the state's overall productivity. The advocacy organizations expect to hold a symposium each year that zeroes in on the progress being made to reduce poverty and near-poverty in the state.



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

Recently, Governor John Baldacci (D) expressed concern about increased poverty among Maine's children. As reported in the KIDS COUNT 2008 data book, 20 percent of the state's preschool children live under the poverty line. Gov. Baldacci has pressed for federal action, noting that, "With the current budget shortfall in Augusta, we know that we face enormous challenges just to maintain our support. Once again, it shows that we need changed policies in Washington, and a renewed commitment to helping those in need."[84]

Sen. Edmonds is hopeful that the measure to establish the council will pass and that it will make a difference. "We need to acknowledge that poverty affects all of us, and that the solutions for raising people out of poverty come from a variety of sources," she said. "The council proposed in my legislation would bring together representatives of the business community, faith-based organizations, advocacy organizations, as well as government-agency staff to propose, implement, and evaluate tools for reducing the prevalence of poverty. Government plays an important role in this task, but not the only one; we need to engage the whole community."[85]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

Michigan

Initiative: State-sponsored poverty summit (2008).

"Unless Michigan confronts its poverty head-on, economic recovery is impossible," contends a *Detroit Free Press* columnist.[86]

To tackle what Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed says "has quietly become the most important question of our time,"[87] Michigan will hold its first state-sponsored poverty summit on November 13, 2008. Leading up to the summit, the Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity will hold six forums across the state.

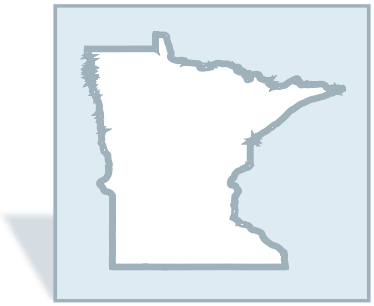
"We have to raise the profile of poverty, show people what's at stake," said Ahmed.[88]

The forums are central to collecting good ideas. "We want to find out what works at the grass-roots level, what programs are innovative in helping people move out of poverty," Commission Chairwoman

Sonia Harb said. "We think it is vitally important that we hear the stories and experiences of people who deal with poverty every day."[89]

The state plans to invite and engage a large number of low-income individuals, which Commission-member Daniel Piepszowski expects will make the summit a unique event. "The commission will be looking at not just at the gaps in services low-income individuals face but also how to maximize the obvious strengths of low-income individuals who show time and time again the fortitude and ingenuity necessary to navigate state systems. We have a lot to learn and a lot to do," Piepszowski said.[90]

The commission is supported by the Department of Human Services' Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity. Established by Governor Jennifer Granholm (D) in 2003, the bureau is charged with advancing state policies and programs to reduce poverty and to address the needs and concerns of low-income people.



Minnesota

Initiative: A target to eliminate poverty[91] is part of the mission of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020, which is due to issue recommendations this year (2006).

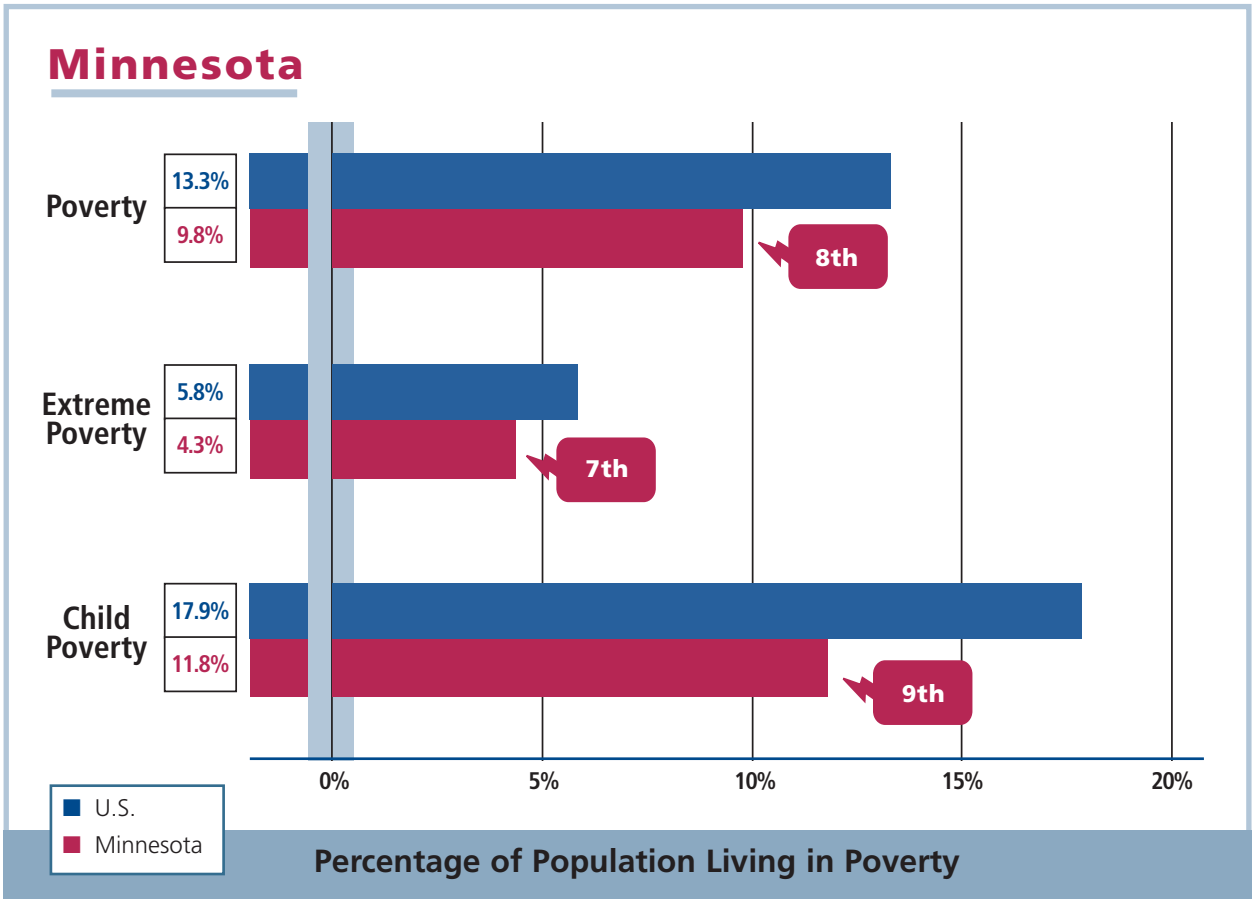
A three-year Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020 is composed of 18 legislators and two non-voting members appointed by the governor. A February 2008 interim report to the legislature will be followed by an exploration of promising policies to solve poverty, with a final report due in December 2008.

Governor Tim Pawlenty (R) authorized the commission when he signed into law a bill championed by outgoing state Senator John C. Hottinger (DFL-St. Peter), who was moved to act following two poverty summits held by state religious leaders in 2004 and 2005.

The Minnesota legislature appropriated $250,000 for the commission's operation, enabling it to hire staff and maintain a Web site, which archives audio and video of commission sessions, agendas from visits around the state, and related resources.[92] The funds also allowed the commissioners to hold formal monthly hearings in the capitol and to travel across the state to see first-hand the struggles of people and communities.

As one reporter noted, "Almost from the start, poverty slapped [the commissioners] in the face."[93] Their trips have included meals in soup kitchens; home visits; rides on mass transit; small group conversations with youth, seniors, and working-age adults; and visits to schools, homeless shelters, and workforce centers.

Advocates are also collaborating with the commission, providing support for regional meetings. Affirmative Options, a statewide coalition of more than 50 organizations, and the Joint Religious



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

Legislative Coalition have partnered in mobilizing advocates. They circulated tips on planning and hosting commission meetings, including how to set up an intimate "circle" in which residents could tell their personal stories directly to the commissioners.[94] As many as 200 people have attended such conversations, and the commission has been open to such input.

Affirmative Options advocates policy changes to improve Minnesota's economy and to create opportunities for low-income people, while the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition mobilizes religious communities to influence public policy in Minnesota. In communicating the state's effort to end poverty, the coalitions have focused on key themes:

- **"It's about all of us:** Our schools, our sense of safety, our communities and our economy's productivity are all better off when poverty does not divert our resources and rob us of our best potential.

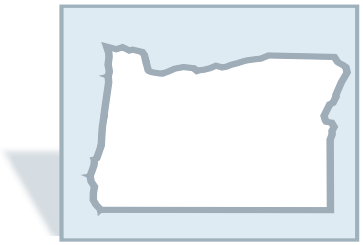
- **"It's time:** Minnesota continues to have a strong economy and a strong foundation from which to challenge poverty. But we also see trends we want to change as soon as possible:

the highest food-shelf growth [is] happening in the suburbs, wages are falling behind the cost of living, the numbers of children in deep poverty have increased steeply in the last couple years, and our state's unemployment numbers no longer are lower than most other states.

- **"It's possible:** This nation ended the widespread destitution of our elderly only a couple of generations ago. We have improved the conditions of the labor market with minimum wages, work-place safety regulations, and the prohibition of child labor. We build from a strong base and a rich legacy in Minnesota." [95]

Gregory Gray, the commission's director, has begun to consider how to develop recommendations for the final report. These will include not just legislative proposals but also, as required by the law, proposals aimed at a full range of other sectors and stakeholders.

While there is a great deal of work remaining to be done, Gray believes the commission has already heralded change: "As a former state legislator, I am familiar with skepticism around social issues," he said. "What has been striking about the commission is that it has clearly opened up the minds of many legislators—not just those on the commission. There is now a sense that we can make a difference if we want to. And legislators now realize that there is a groundswell of constituent support for action in districts both poor and wealthy." [96]



Oregon

Initiative: A benchmark calls for poverty to drop to 10 percent by 2010 from 2004's 12.1 percent (1989).

The Oregon Progress Board is required by law to report annually if the state is making progress according to its 91 benchmarks. The 1989 law created the board as an independent state agency that oversees its systems of "indicators chosen by Oregonians as fair, efficient ways to measure economic, social, and environmental progress." [97]

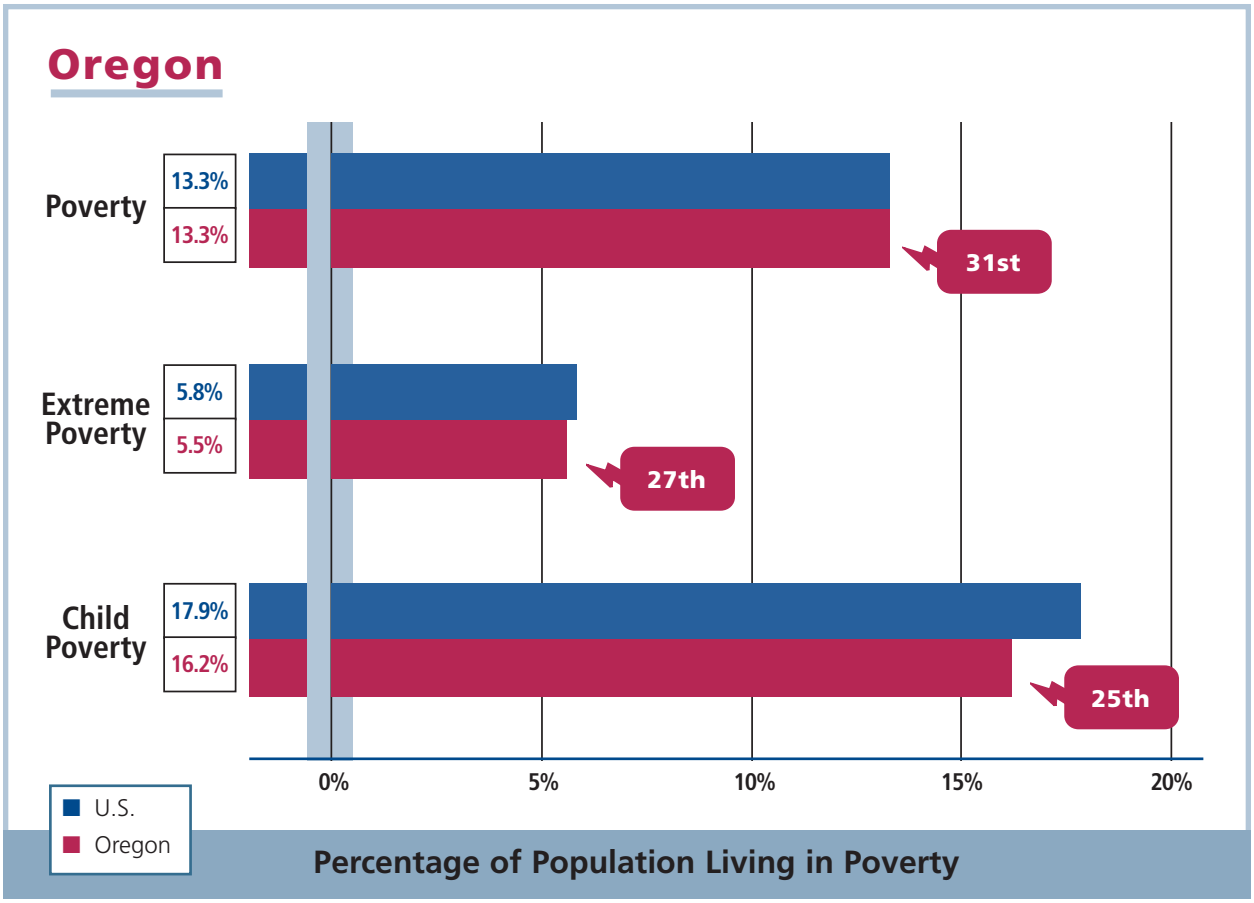
Benchmark 54 reports on the status of poverty in the state and establishes a target: by 2010, no more than 10 percent of the state's population should be living in poverty. If achieved, this would represent a cut in poverty of nearly 17 percent in the six-year period between 2004 and 2010. Oregon pairs goal-setting with a deadline, which sets it apart from many other states with benchmark systems.

As the governor's Human Services policy advisor noted in the 2007 Progress Report, "Investments that target family economic stability, prevention, and early intervention aren't just the most fiscally efficient investments we can make—they're also the investments that will make the biggest differences in our ability to improve the health and safety of our communities and the educational outcomes of our children." [98] The report established that "the most telling benchmark, personal income as a percent of the U.S. [average], is near its lowest level in 20 years. Only one Oregon worker in three is at or above 150 percent of poverty for a family of four." [99]

In Oregon, benchmarks have made a difference. They informed Oregonians that their state had particularly bad hunger levels, as Governor Theodore Kulongoski acknowledged in his 2003 State-of-the-State address, shortly after his inauguration.[100] He set out to make hunger a priority issue. One result was an 80-percent increase in Food-Stamp participation in 2005. To sustain public attention, in 2007 Gov. Kulongoski and his wife lived on a food budget of $21 per person for a week—the average for Food-Stamp participants.

As he explained, one of the governor's top priorities since he took office "has been to put the issue of hunger into the lap of every Oregonian." He also asserts that "the solution to Oregon's hunger problem is creating opportunity for good, living-wage jobs."[101]

Oregon Thrives, a partnership of five nonprofit organizations and the state's Housing and Community Services Department, reiterates the governor's theme to look beyond one particular program or problem. Oregon Thrives seeks to demonstrate "how all efforts are interrelated, and how one investment reduces the need for other investments. For example, if you increase worker training and stabilize housing, people get better jobs and will not need food boxes or help paying their energy bill."[102]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

The governor took the Food-Stamp challenge to build further public awareness of the intersection of hunger and income. He went further and challenged "all of you to consider taking the Food-Stamp challenge—if not this week, than maybe another one— and put yourselves at least part-way in the shoes of a family struggling to make ends meet. Challenge your friends and neighbors to do the same—or just have a conversation with them about what it means to be hungry in Oregon. Help them to understand that hunger is an income problem—that most Oregonians who are hungry are also working, but aren't making enough to afford the basics that most of us take for granted."[103] By 2004, Oregon had gone from the state with the worst rank (50th) on hunger to 26th in the nation.[104]

Rhode Island

Initiative: Commission on Family Income and Asset-Building (2007).

The Joint Resolution, enacted in 2007, calls for a bicameral and bipartisan legislative commission.[105] The kickoff will feature the recommendations from Providence Mayor David Cicilline's (D) Poverty Work and Opportunity Task Force. In addition, the commission will hear about developments in other states and discuss skills-building, work supports, predatory lending, and financial literacy.

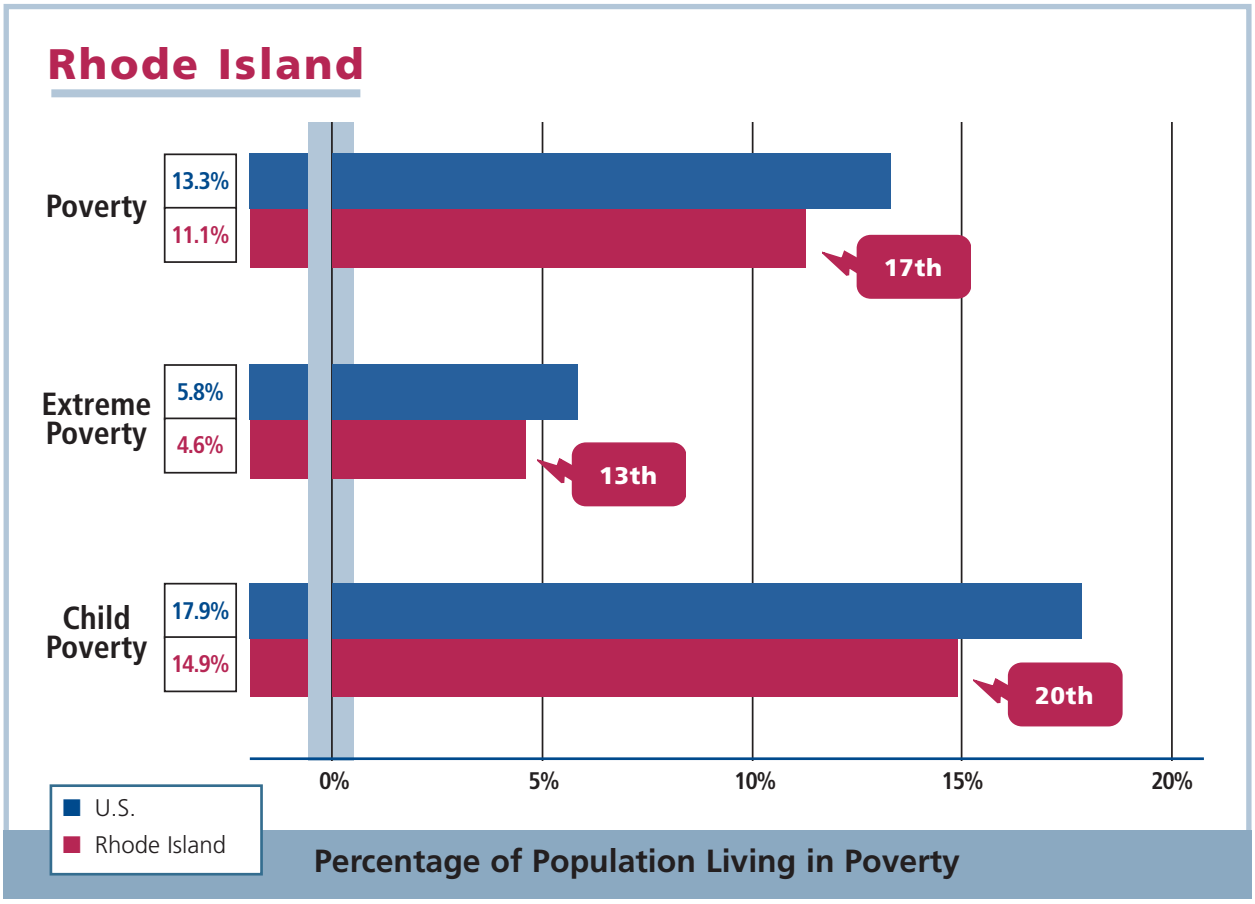
The original measure called for a report in January 2008, but the deadline has been extended to June. The commission has at least eight sessions planned before then.

The commission's purposes include identifying programs and legislation that already exist and new laws and programs necessary to:

- Build income and assets for families
- Promote financial education, literacy, and counseling
- Protect families from predatory and abusive financial services

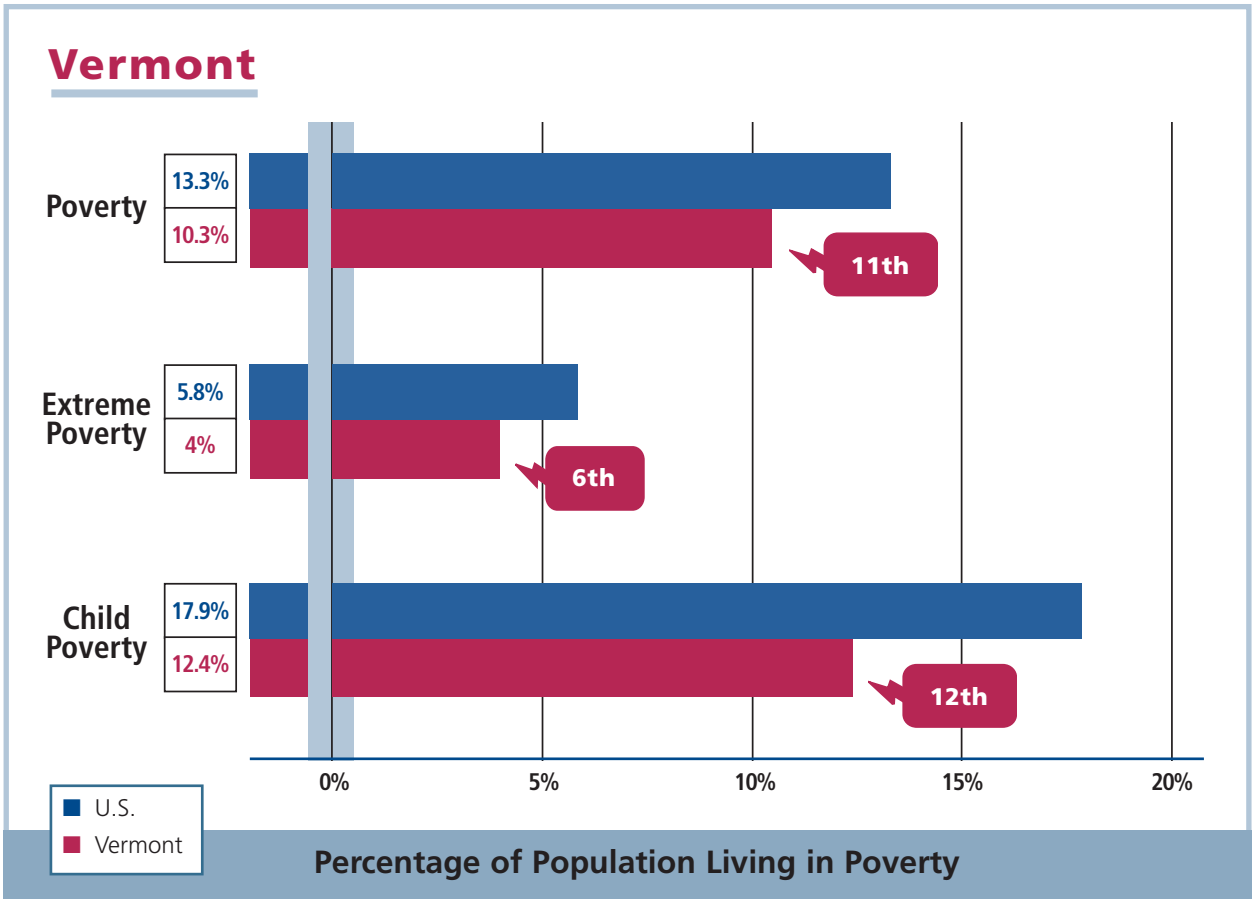
It is expected that the commission will "work with charitable foundations, local government, community-based organizations, policy and research organizations, advocacy organizations, and other entities as may be appropriate to advance the financial security and viability of families."[106]

Poverty Institute Director Linda Katz observes that "the budget crisis that Rhode Island is facing makes the commission's work all the more critical. Coordinating public and private strategies to help parents get family-sustaining jobs with health benefits is not only vital to the families' economic well-being but is part of the solution to the deficit as more people pay taxes and rely less on publicly funded programs."[107]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

As Commission-member and Senator Juan Pichardo (D-Providence) notes, "This commission is tackling new problems—unscrupulous financial practices that can set anybody back, but it's worse when you are already struggling and have no cushion to provide for your loved ones. How money is handled is one thing; making enough of it is another focus. We need to find ways to ensure our workers can get the skills they need for the ever-changing job market. We need to dig in—not just to find solutions for the state but to build the political will for those solutions."[108]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

Vermont

Initiative: A target to cut child poverty in half by 2017 is overseen by the Child Poverty Council (2007).

On June 5, 2007, the Vermont legislature passed a bill establishing the Child Poverty Council.[109] The measure is similar but not identical to the 2004 Connecticut child-poverty-target legislation. Notably, the council is to identify "priorities for implementing strategies" along with "biannual benchmarks" toward achieving at least a 50-percent reduction in child poverty in Vermont by 2017.[110] Annually, the council is to report on the progress in meeting the biannual benchmarks. It is made up of six legislators, four state department commissioners, and four others representing various constituencies.

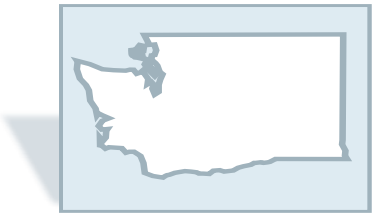
The bill was introduced by Senator Doug Racine (D-Chittenden), the chair of the Committee on Health and Welfare and a former lieutenant governor. For Racine, the impetus was simple: "We're seeing growing income inequality here. We're seeing more and more families with children showing up at homeless shelters and food shelves…Children who are in poverty are not doing nearly as well in school as the other children. It's time to do something about it."[111]

To date, the council has pursued two broad missions. First, as required by the law, it hosted public hearings in each of the state's 14 counties in 2007. As the council co-chair and social worker, Representative Ann Pugh (D-South Burlington), noted, "We stayed away from Montpelier and got out around the state…We could hear directly from people who never could get to the capitol. So we heard a lot from those who are struggling to make ends meet. And we heard good ideas along the way."[112]

Sen. Racine, the council's other co-chair, added, "One of the important results of going around the state is that local media covered the hearings. Since part of our mission is to make sure all Vermonters understand what it means to be poor and near-poor in our state today, getting the newspapers and other media to cover the stories of working families wrestling with the realities of getting by helps a lot."[113]

The council also heard from experts. At one session, advice was offered by Anne Foley, a senior advisor in Connecticut's Office of Policy Management, the lead agency for that state's council and poverty target. She urged the Vermont council to "avoid too many recommendations," noting that a shorter set contributes to a better focus. Foley also urged the council to consider and make decisions on which measures of poverty would be utilized. In Connecticut, both the official poverty line and 200 percent of poverty are taken into account.[114]

The next mission of the council is to develop and issue its report, and then it will follow up on its recommendations.



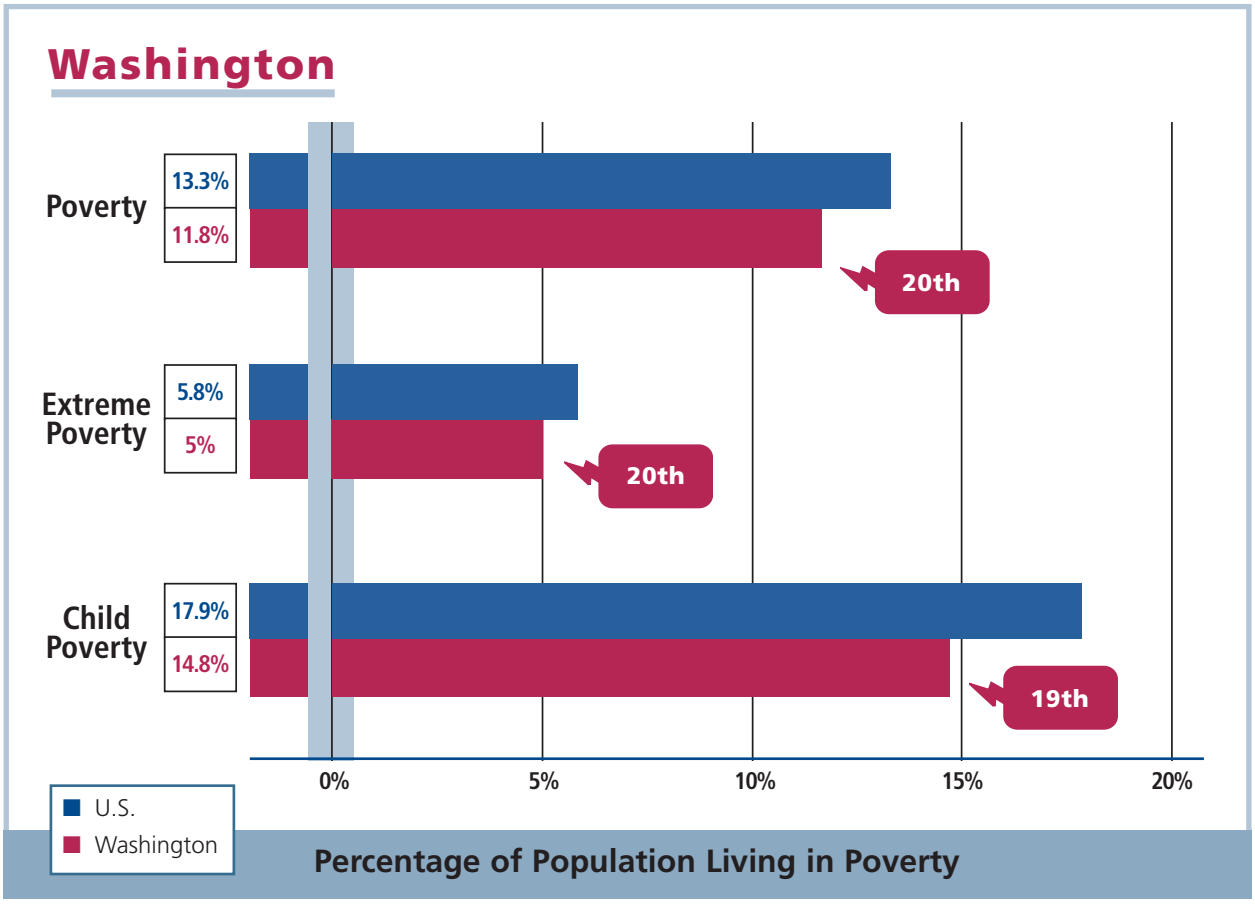
Washington

Initiative: Poverty Advisory Committee (2006).

Washington's Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED) established the Poverty Advisory Committee, which included leaders from state agencies and advocacy groups. In formulating its set of recommendations, the committee added its expertise to the perspectives of citizens who participated in a set of community forums that preceded the Advisory Committee's deliberations.[115]

The community forums helped to identify the issues crucial to moving families out of poverty. Family-wage jobs, housing, healthcare, mental-health services, and transportation surfaced as major issues. The committee took stakeholder opinions—including those of the nearly 500 individuals who participated in the community forums—into account when it formulated its recommendations, issued in May of 2007.

A key reason for gaining local insights was the fact that, as noted in the committee's report, "Washington's prosperity needs to reach all parts of our state and improve the lives of all of our residents. To make permanent, effective improvements, poverty needs to be fought at the local level where solutions are crafted that fit the unique character of each of our cities and counties."[116]



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1701-02* and Table 9.
The lowest poverty level is in the state ranked 1st.

The Advisory Committee recommendations are grouped as follows:

- Basic Needs: housing, food, transportation, health
- Challenging Poverty: moving families and individuals out of poverty
- System Improvements: improve services, streamline administration

Among the recommendations are: companies that receive CTED funds should report and get incentives for hiring low-income workers, education foundations and state agencies should be encouraged to expand financial literacy, and local developers should be encouraged to use innovative state incentives related to affordable housing.[117]

Statistics

Sources of overall poverty and extreme poverty statistics and rankings by state:
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Source of child poverty statistics and rankings, by state:
U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, *R1702. Percent of Related Children Under 18 Years Below Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months: 2006.*
http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-_box_head_nbr=R1702&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-mt_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_R1701_US30&-format=US-30&-CONTEXT=grt

State Initiative Charts

Notes:

- Charts will be updated as states make additional recommendations.
- Recommendations may or may not have been considered or acted upon.
- Recommendations should be used as a reference tool to identify which policies have gained attention where; the absence of a recommendation in a given state does not indicate disinterest in that area (e.g., a state may not have a recommendation to expand EITC not because it is disinterested in EITC but because it already accomplished a major expansion.)
- Categories used to track state recommendations here are identical to those used to track national organization reports at: http://www.affirmativeoptions.org

State Initiatives: Overview and Links

States	Initiative (Year Established)	Poverty Target	Report Links and Status
Alabama	House Task Force on Poverty (2007)		Report — 2008 Creation of a permanent, bipartisan commission on the Reduction of Poverty is recommended by the Poverty Task Force.
Colorado	Common Good Caucus (2007)		The 2008 goal of the bicameral, bipartisan caucus is to develop a 2009 agenda.
Connecticut	Child Poverty Council (2004) merged into the Child Poverty and Prevention Council (2006)	CHILD POVERTY Cut 50% by 2014	Progress Report — Jan. 2008 Expert Panel Recommendations — Dec. 2007 Progress Report — Jan. 2007 Agency Prevention Report — Jan. 2007 Progress Report — Jan. 2006 Initial Plan — Jan. 2005
Delaware	Child Poverty Task Force (2007)	CHILD POVERTY Cut 50% by 2017	A 10-year-plan is due to the governor in 2008.
District of Columbia	D.C. Poverty Commission (2006)		Commissioners are being appointed; the 2008 sunset date will likely be extended.
Iowa	Successful Families Caucus (2007)		Initiated by a bipartisan team of four legislators, the caucus is now made up of one-fifth of the General Assembly. Legislation is pending.
Michigan	First poverty summit sponsored by state (2008)		Leading up to the summit, scheduled for November 2008, the Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity will hold six forums across the state.
Minnesota	Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020 (2006)	OVERALL POVERTY "End" poverty by 2020	Recommendations are due December 15, 2008. The commission has held nine regional meetings. The legislature appropriated $250,000 for the commission's three year operation.
Oregon	Oregon Progress Board (1989) Independent executive agency; created by legislature	OVERALL POVERTY Drop the rate of poverty from 12.1% to no more than 10% by 2010	The Oregon Progress Board set 91 benchmarks that measure progress on a range of issues, including poverty. That benchmark calls for a drop in the rate of poverty, which, if achieved, would represent a cut in poverty of nearly 17 percent within six years.
Rhode Island	Commission on Family Income and Asset-Building (2007)		Report and recommendations due June 2008.
Vermont	Child Poverty Council (2007)	CHILD POVERTY Cut 50% by 2017	Report and recommendations due soon.
Washington	Poverty Advisory Committee (2006) Committee created by executive agency		Report — 2007
PENDING INITIATIVES			
Alabama	**Pending:** Permanent Commission on the Reduction of Poverty		If enacted, the bicameral commission would report annually to the legislature regarding its evaluation of current and proposed policy. Operational funds would be appropriated.
Illinois	**Pending:** Commission on Poverty Eradication (2008)	EXTREME POVERTY Cut 50% by 2015	If enacted, the commission would issue an interim report and recommendations by March 1, 2009.
Louisiana	**Pending:** Child Poverty Prevention Fund, implemented by a Child Poverty Prevention Council (2008)	CHILD POVERTY Cut 50% by 2018	If enacted, the Child Poverty Prevention Council would oversee a fund aimed at halving child poverty and would give grants directly to parishes, focusing on those with high poverty rates. The council would be housed within the Department of Social Services and would include representatives from six state departments.
Maine	**Pending:** Council on Poverty and Economic Security (2007)	If established, council may set targets for the elimination of poverty.	If enacted, the council would meet at least annually to develop recommendations and would report to the governor and the legislature every two years.

State Initiatives: Checklist of Recommendations

TOPIC	Income & Assets *e.g.* • Wages • Taxes • Predatory Lending • Independent Development Accounts	Adult Education & Employment *e.g.* • Postsecondary • Infrastructure • Prisoner Reentry • Workforce Investment Act • Employer Incentives	Child Education & Child Care *e.g.* • Early Childhood Education • K-12 • Child Care	Work Supports & Safety Net *e.g.* • Unemployment Insurance • TANF • Transportation • 211 Social Services Directory • Public Benefits "Cliffs"	Housing & Health *e.g.* • Transitional Housing • Rental Subsidies • Mental Health • Insurance Rates	Family Structure *e.g.* • Teen Pregnancy Reduction • Home-Visiting • Fatherhood Initiatives • Couples/ Marriage	Links to Reports; Notes *e.g.* • Poverty Measure
STATE:							
Alabama	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	**Report — 2008** The Poverty Task Force also recommended the creation of a bipartisan permanent formal commission on the Reduction of Poverty and a report for the legislature that offers an overall needs assessment.
Connecticut	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**Child Poverty Council Report — 2005** The council's initial plan lists 67 recommendations. While a subcommittee identified six top priorities, the report includes the full list. **Expert Panel Recommendations — 2007** The expert panel prioritized the 67 recommendations, highlighting 13 most likely to reduce child poverty in the short term. Among those recommendations: Evaluate effectiveness of the implementation of the council's recommendations. Provide low-income individuals with an expectation of success regarding possibilities and techniques for achievement. Increase ESL programming. Enhance availability of transportation.
Iowa	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Washington		✓		✓		✓	**Report — 2008** The Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development strives to educate residents about the complexity of poverty issues through education, community, and business contacts. CTED hosted forums across the state which had nearly 500 participants.

Recommendations Detailed by Policy Area: Income & Assets

Alabama	Require businesses that receive economic incentives pay a wage equal to the area median-income level. Encourage the promotion of the EITC for low-income workers. Raise the income-tax threshold to the poverty level. Eliminate sales tax on groceries/food. Exempt thrift stores on military bases from sales tax. Regulate the interest rate of payday- and title-loan companies. Enable and fund IDAs to match savings for low-income families. The savings can be used to purchase a home, finance higher education, or start a business.
Connecticut	Expand property-tax rebates to include low-income families raising children. Create dependent exemptions against state income tax. Charge higher income-tax rates for highest earners. Dedicate part of community college graduates' income tax to community college system through "check off" box on income-tax forms. Provide payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) for group homes. Refundable state EITC. EITC outreach. Create child-care and/or child-education credit that phases out as household income increases and is at least partially refundable Curb predatory lending (limit interest rates and ban negative amortization.) Strengthen state's IDA program and make available to all working families. Encourage low-income individuals to bank and accumulate assets. Encourage entrepreneurship. Expand second-mortgage pool.
Connecticut *Expert Panel Recommendations*	Refundable state EITC. EITC outreach.
Iowa	Offer financial consumer protection. Secure EITC increase from 7 to 10 percent of federal EITC.
Washington	Assist state, public, and private programs that encourage financial-literacy education and asset-building programs for low-income residents.

Recommendations Detailed by Policy Area: Adult Education & Employment

Alabama	Require workforce development programs funded by the state to have low-income population/area recruitment goals.
Connecticut	Enhance parents' educational attainment, skills, and employment opportunities. Increase low-income parents' access to literacy, postsecondary, and vocational education. Enhance literacy programs for adults including Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED services. Increase vocational training opportunities for populations that do not have high school diplomas or have limited English proficiency. Provide assistance with vocational and postsecondary education expenses (tuition, books, supplies, child care, transportation, tools, or license fees). Provide subsidies for low-income individuals to attend community college, *e.g.* through means-tested tuition relief. Spend higher proportion of TFA funds on job training and education. Create state-funded work-study programs to supplement federal work-study programs. Provide additional incentives for businesses to locate in areas accessible to low-income individuals. Link training to industries and encourage training programs to develop curricula to meet workforce-shortage and high-growth employment areas. Provide resources to the Workforce Investment Boards and strengthen the employer-service component of the CTWorks centers as a "one-stop" for services that employers need. Provide public jobs programs by increasing participation in Hiring Incentive Tax Credit program, available to companies that hire recipients of the TFA program.
Connecticut *Expert Panel Recommendations*	Increase cash assistance and other forms of support for postsecondary education, including community college, vocational education, and ESL.
Iowa	Develop workforce strategies that improve outreach, referral, and collaboration among and by agency partners at the state and local levels.

Recommendations Detailed by Policy Area: Child Education & Child Care

Alabama	Provide additional funds to Head Start, until there is no waiting list. As funds are available, condition approvals of "First Class" pre-K with two recommendations: • Funds should target low-income communities. • Monthly co-pay for low-income families should be reduced.
Connecticut	Provide "education through birth": support school-readiness and early childhood education. Create one coordinated system for early childhood education. Provide comprehensive early childhood education programs with mandated parent involvement. Enhance preschool teacher training (including on-site consultation for preschool teachers) to encourage earning advanced degrees. Amend preschool system to allow full-day, full-year (or school-day, school-year) programming. Advocate for year-round school programming for grades K-3 in low-income districts. Expand, enhance, and subsidize after-school programming. Shift Educational Cost-Sharing formula to provide more resources in certain municipalities. Develop incentives to recruit and retain qualified teachers to work in low-income school districts. Enhance drop-out prevention efforts. *Re: Care4Kids:* • Increase child-care subsidy to more closely match current market costs. • Increase number of child-care certificates. • Expand facilities for child care. • Expand child-care eligibility to cover those in education or job training programs. Enhance training of child-care workers. Ensure adequate wages and benefits for child-care workers. Subsidize parents to stay home and care for children.
Connecticut *Expert Panel Recommendations*	Amend preschool system to allow full-day, full-year (or school-day, school-year) preschool. Advocate for year-round school programming for grades K-3. Enhance drop-out prevention efforts. Develop incentives to recruit and retain qualified teachers to work in low-income school districts. Make child-care subsidies available to all low-income families, up to 200 percent of poverty.
Iowa	Provide K-12 comprehensive financial literacy.

Recommendations Detailed by Policy Area: Work Supports & Safety Net

Alabama	Supportive of a 211 comprehensive directory of services that would be available to all.
Connecticut	Allow postsecondary education and vocational training to count toward the federal work participation requirement under the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program. *Re: Jobs First Employment Services (JFES)*: Comprehensive up-front assessment of barriers to employment to quickly identify fragile/high-barrier populations. Assessing each JFES participant to determine reason for lack of skills; develop individualized plans to remove barriers to employment (and if not possible within 21 months, classify participant as exempt from JFES work requirement and TFA time limits). Provide intensive case-management to identify ways to reduce barriers to employment for families with extreme barriers. Enhance level of financial support for families with extreme barriers to employment by increasing cash-assistance levels until parents can bring in more earnings. Create child-only grant for children whose parents have died or are incapacitated; and those in the care of a grandparent. Rethink 21-month time limit in TFA. Improve Food-Stamp participation rates. Enhance Unemployment Insurance (UI) for those who have been laid off. Extend UI benefit period. Increase UI benefits. Create additional "good cause" exemptions to voluntary quit provisions. Expand UI eligibility for benefits to part-time workers. Ensure culturally competent case-management services. Undertake study to identify eligibility "cliffs" in state's various assistance programs. Develop recommendations regarding most effective and economically-efficient ways to provide supplemental assistance to support families' journeys to economic self-sufficiency.
Connecticut *Expert Panel Recommendations*	Provide intensive case management to identify ways and reduce barriers to employment for families with extreme barriers. Improve Food-Stamp participation rates. Amend state welfare programs so parents receiving welfare benefits, especially TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and housing, don't abruptly lose benefits. Increase uptake among eligible families in Food Stamps, child nutrition, WIC, SSI, energy assistance, and other programs providing income support. Help high-risk populations with multiple barriers and most difficulty sustaining employment.
Washington	Coordinate state programs providing food to meet low-income nutritional needs. Statewide implementation of 211 social-services telephone referral system. Combine and consolidate reporting, monitoring, and auditing between government agencies and agency departments.

Recommendations Detailed by Policy Area: Housing & Health

Alabama	Create Affordable Housing Trust Fund Task Force charged with developing comprehensive recommendation to legislature on a housing trust fund prior to its 2009 Session. Reduce the time municipalities have to wait to demolish or sell abandoned or destroyed houses. Develop a current study of housing needs and conduct an analysis on findings focusing on low-income individuals and families. Ensure that medical providers do not charge those without insurance more than Medicaid patients or other insured groups.
Connecticut	Increase shelters and transitional living options for people discharged from inpatient behavioral-health treatment facilities. Expand availability of state rental assistance subsidies. Expand Transitional Rental Assistance Program (T-RAP) to allow families to remain eligible for longer period of time. Expand availability of affordable, family-sized housing units. Provide incentives to housing developers to develop family-sized units. Create Housing Trust Fund. Expand supportive housing for families. Expand use of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to help finance housing and rehabilitation efforts. Enforce laws ensuring non-discrimination based on rent source. Encourage programs that facilitate homeownership, especially in central cities and among minorities. Ensure public or private health-insurance coverage for parents. Provide tax incentives to small businesses that offer health insurance to employees and their dependents. Allow uninsured parents to buy into state employee health insurance plan. Reduce medical expenses by expanding HUSKY to cover uninsured parents and relative caregivers of all HUSKY-eligible children with premiums increasing as family income increases up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Restore presumptive and continuous eligibility provisions under HUSKY. Enhance mechanism to provide information about employer-sponsored health insurance coverage for TFA participants transitioning off cash assistance. Advocate for universal health insurance for families of children living in poverty. Ensure access to sufficient number of health-care providers in the community and timely appointments. Strengthen health-care coordination and outreach. Enhance prevention and early-intervention programs. Increase education about preventing disease and accessing disease-prevention services, *e.g.*, diabetes, obesity. Provide immunizations for all children. Increase early identification and accessible, culturally appropriate health-promotion and health-care services for all families, especially families with a parent or child with mental illness or substance abuse problems. Enhance medical and behavioral health-care availability for families with special needs. Strengthen care for children with special health-care needs through transitional programs and medical home model through the DPH. Expand availability of behavioral health inpatient- and outpatient-treatment services.
Connecticut *Expert Panel Recommendations*	Expand availability of state rental-assistance subsidies. Ensure all parents and children receive health care for which they're eligible. Expand health coverage to non-parental caretakers with whom children reside.
Iowa	Provide health care coverage for all children through either public or private insurers.
Washington	Increase low-income/affordable-housing projects and programs. Help homeless and transitional-housing seekers. Expand dental care for low-income adults and children. Increase access to health and mental-health care.

Recommendations Detailed by Policy Area: Family Structure

Connecticut	Provide family planning and decrease teen pregnancy. Provide culturally competent newborn-to-5 home visiting, medical, and social services. Enhance fatherhood initiatives and child-support enforcement. Increase economic opportunity for men to increase marriage rates. Create stable, two-parent homes with two earners. Establish and maintain infrastructure to support young at-risk families through early intervention.
Connecticut *Expert Panel Recommendations*	Remove marriage penalties. Prevent teen pregnancies. Programs should be adopted to help males complete high school and transition into the labor force. Policies that increase work incentives (*e.g.*, wage subsidies) should also be considered.

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