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Number of Poor Georgians Highest This Decade, Census Data Show

Grim Data Point to Importance of State Lawmakers Revising Approach to Meeting Needs

A larger number of Georgians live in poverty than any time this decade, according to Census Bureau data released today. The number of individuals living in poverty in 2008 grew by 57,014 from 2007.

As more and more families fall into poverty in Georgia, economic hardship is spreading wider across the state to households in the middle of the income spectrum, which are also failing to see gains over the decade.

Although the national recession is a major factor in Georgia's declining economic prospects, the state's failure to adequately respond threatens to make things worse.

"More and more Georgia families are struggling to make ends meet, yet our state's policymakers continue to cut critical services like healthcare and education, and to divert Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds from struggling families to fill state budget gaps," said [Clare S. Richie](#), Sr. Policy Analyst for the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute, an independent, nonpartisan think tank.

"Public needs are growing dramatically and the state's ability to meet them are shrinking, indicating that we now more than ever need a balanced approach to this economic crisis that includes revenues. Only then can Georgia give people the help they need today and invest in tomorrow's economic growth."

Poverty on the Rise, Data for 2009 Likely Worse

Georgia's overall poverty rate was 14.7 percent for 2008, well above its 2001 level of 11.7 percent during the last recession.

Roughly one in 7 individuals lived in poverty in 2008. The state's poverty rate is 14th highest in the country, again reflecting Georgia's race to the bottom. Vulnerable groups such as children often are hit hardest during recessions. In Georgia, 20.1 percent or one out of every five children were poor in 2008.

Today's numbers remind us that poverty and the stagnation of the typical household income affected a large share of Georgia's individuals, families, and children even before the worst part of the recession hit.

As troubling as the 2008 figures are, today's reality is even worse. Poverty typically rises when joblessness increases; unemployment has risen sharply this year, from 6.4 percent in August 2008 to 10.2 percent in August 2009, and reaching Depression levels in four counties (15.9 – 24.9 percent).

“State policymakers should act quickly to help poor families out of poverty and set the stage for shared prosperity when the economy eventually recovers,” said Richie, author of the groundbreaking Strategies Georgia Can Use to Reduce Rising Poverty.

Georgia's Families Face Stagnant Incomes

Georgia's 2008 median household income is \$50,861. While this is about average for the nation as a whole, and higher than that of our southern neighbors, the typical Georgia household did not see median income growth from 2001 to 2008 (after adjusting for inflation).

Despite signs of economic recovery, job loss has yet to bottom out and Georgia faces budget shortfalls into fiscal year 2011 totaling \$2 billion.

“As long as unemployment and poverty are rising, the state needs a strategy that goes beyond just cutting the budget,” Richie said. “No single answer solves a problem this big; using cuts alone only damages the economy further. Policymakers should take a balanced approach to position Georgia when prosperity returns.”

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NOTE TO EDITORS/REPORTERS: Richie is available for interviews. Richie can also provide county-specific data upon request. cricchie@gbpi.org

Download *Strategies Georgia Can Use to Reduce Rising Poverty, A Review of Successful TANF-Funded State Initiatives That Increase Family Self-Sufficiency* at www.GBPI.org. The report is funded in part by United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta.

About the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute

GBPI is the state's leading independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization engaged in research and education about the fiscal and economic health of the state of Georgia. The Institute provides reliable and timely analysis of Georgia's budget and tax policies and promotes greater state government fiscal accountability, improved services, and an enhanced quality of life for all Georgians. www.GBPI.org