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Census Numbers Indicate Progress on Poverty, Income and Number of Uninsured Despite Progress, West Virginia Still Ranks Poorly in Poverty and Income

CHARLESTON – Today, the U.S. Census Bureau released 2007 data on poverty, income and health insurance. While the 2007 numbers show improvements in the overall economic conditions of low and middle-income West Virginians, the Mountain State still ranks in the bottom on many key indicators.

POVERTY DECREASING, BUT REMAINS HIGH

The information below is from the American Community Survey:

- The **poverty rate** dropped to 16.9 in 2007 from 17.3 percent in 2006. This figure was lower than anytime during the last eight years. In 2000, the state poverty rate was 18.6. While West Virginia saw significant drops in poverty in 2007, the state was tied with Alabama with the sixth highest rate of poverty in the country.
- **Child poverty** also fell, from 24.6 percent in 2006 to 22.8 percent in 2007. However, this still means that almost 1 in 4 children in West Virginia are classified as poor. West Virginia has the ninth highest child poverty rate in the country, despite significant gains in made over the last few years.
- **Family Poverty** in West Virginia increased slightly from 12.7 percent in 2006 to 12.9 percent in 2007. These numbers are down from 2000, when 14.7 percent of families in West Virginia were in poverty.

“West Virginia should comprehensively address poverty, especially child poverty, as many other states are doing. One effective anti-poverty tool at our disposal is the State Earned Income Tax Credit (SEITC),” said Ted Boettner, director of the WV Center on Budget and Policy. “We could join the other 24 states that have enacted a (SEITC) modeled after the federal EITC,” said Boettner.

Approximately 145,000 low-income working families in West Virginia could benefit from a SEITC. Enacting a SEITC would not only improve tax fairness, it would help make work pay by supplementing the wages of low-income workers, and move low income working West Virginians toward long term financial security. Boettner also pointed out that twenty-eight other states offer child-care tax credits or deductions that significantly help low-income families.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME UP, BUT RANKS 2nd LOWEST

The information below is from the American Community Survey:

- **Median household income** - a common barometer of how the typical household is faring – increased by almost a thousand dollars in 2007. In 2006, median household income was \$36,054, increasing to \$37,060 in 2007. Since 2000, West Virginia's median household income has grown by 5.6 percent, from \$35,024 to 37,060. This was the ninth highest growth in median household income in the country. Despite our positive gains, West Virginia had the second lowest median household income the nation. Border state Maryland had the highest median household income in the nation at \$68,080, almost double West Virginia's.

"One reason for West Virginia's modest growth in household income and declining poverty rate in 2007 was the state's relatively low unemployment rate of 4.6 last year." said Boettner. "Unlike most states, West Virginia has seen moderate growth for middle income families. This is a positive sign, but it also shows how much West Virginia is not subject to the booms and busts of economic cycles like other states."

HEALTH COVERAGE STAGNANT, GAINS IN HEALTH CARE FOR CHILDREN

- Approximately 250,000 or 13.8 percent of West Virginians did not have **health insurance coverage** in the 2006-2007 period, according to the Current Population Survey released today by the Census Bureau. This is slightly up from the 2000-2001 period, when 13.3 percent of West Virginians didn't have health coverage. Nationwide, the number of people without health insurance coverage declined from 47 million (15.8 percent) in 2006 to 45.7 million (15.3 percent) in 2007.
- The number of children at 200 percent of the poverty level without health insurance is at a record low at 2.4 percent in 2007. The national average was approximately 6.9 percent in 2007. Because of investment in WV CHIP and Medicaid, most children now have access to affordable health coverage.

"West Virginia has done a good job of insuring children, but we have made little progress in expanding health coverage to adults," said Renate Pore, a health policy analyst with the WVCBP.

"Unless they receive a generous benefit package from their employer, low income adults have virtually no opportunity to purchase health care. While overall rates of uninsurance have not changed much in West Virginia, the number of employed West Virginians between the ages of 18 and 64 are at increasing risk of losing coverage. Health security continues to be a major issue for West Virginia's working families," said Pore.

Eighteen states have expanded Medicaid coverage above 100 percent of the federal

poverty level and another 21 have expanded coverage to between 50 and 99 percent of the federal poverty level.

“Given West Virginia’s three to one match rate for Medicaid, this is could be a good option to pursue and would cover about 100,000 uninsured West Virginia adults,” according to Perry Bryant, executive director of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care.”

STATE AND MICRO AREA POVERTY AND INCOME

2007 POVERTY & INCOME RANKINGS: WV AND U.S.

	WV	US Average	WV Ranking	2006 Ranking
Total Poverty Rate	16.9	13	6th Highest	5th Highest
Child Poverty Rate	22.8	18	9th Highest	5th Highest
Seniors in Poverty	10.4	9.5	16th Highest	16th Highest
Median Household Income	\$37,060	\$50,740	2nd Lowest	2nd Lowest
Median Earnings of Full-Time Females	\$26,719	\$34,278	50th Lowest	51st Lowest
Median Earnings of Full-Time Males	\$40,126	\$44,255	39th lowest	42nd Lowest

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Rankings include District of Columbia)

WEST VIRGINIA LOCAL/METROPOLITAN AREAS POVERTY AND MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (MHI), 2006-7

	2006	2007	2006	2007
	Poverty Rate		Median Houshold Income	
United States	13.3	13	\$48,451	\$50,740
West Virginia	17.3	16.9	\$35,059	\$37,060
Charleston, WV Metro Area	15.7	14.2	\$36,660	\$39,829
Beckley, WV Micro Area	14.5	15.8	\$38,924	\$39,498
Bluefield, WV-VA Micro Area	21.4	21.4	\$29,261	\$31,548
Clarksburg, WV Micro Area	18.8	18.5	\$36,496	\$36,871
Huntington-Ashland, WV-KY-OH Metro Area	18.7	19.1	\$34,545	\$34,903
Morgantown, WV Metro Area	18.4	16.5	\$34,908	\$39,319
Wheeling, WV-OH Metro Area	17.3	15.7	\$32,510	\$35,446
Weirton-Steubenville, WV-OH Metro-Area	16	14.5	\$34,776	\$38,698

Source: U.S. Census Bureau