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Slightly More New Mexicans Living in Poverty in 2008

U.S. Census Sees First National Poverty Increase since 2004 and Highest since 1997

Santa Fe, New Mexico – The 2008 U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) released today shows that the national rate for people living in poverty (13.2 percent) saw its first increase since 2004 and its highest rate since 1997, with slightly more New Mexicans living in poverty in 2008.

The total percentage of people living in poverty in New Mexico using the three-year average for 2006-2008 is at 16.7 percent compared to 16.3 percent in 2005-2007. New Mexico does have the fourth highest rate in the U.S. behind Mississippi (20.5 percent), District of Columbia (17.6 percent), and Louisiana (17.1 percent).

“There are far too many families living in poverty in New Mexico,” said Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department Secretary. “We see the need each and every day in our Income Support Division offices where families go to receive cash, food, medical and energy assistance to help them make ends meet each month. This kind of poverty negatively affects New Mexico’s economy, businesses and tax base as well as the families trying to live with such few resources.”

New Mexico has seen a 21.9 percent increase in participation in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, called the New Mexico Works program, with 17,482 cases in June, 2009. Family participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) has seen a 29.8 percent increase this year with 127,141 cases (318,416 individuals) in June, 2009.

During Governor Richardson’s administration several programs have been enhanced to help better serve New Mexico’s families needing assistance. For example, in July 2008 the State SNAP benefits supplement was created to assist seniors and people with disabilities who were receiving the minimum SNAP benefit, sometimes as little as \$10 per month. The state was able to double the minimum to \$20 until March 2009 when the minimum benefit became \$30.

In January 2008 the first increase to the state's Standard of Need in 12 years took place raising the benefit of low-income New Mexico's through the New Mexico Works Program by 15 percent.

And, beginning in January 2008, families with school aged children participating in the TANF program began receiving an increase in the clothing allowance as well as receiving it twice per school-year in August and January instead of only in August of each year.

People wanting more information about several cash, food and energy assistance available through the Income Support Division should call 1-888-473-3676 or visit the Human Services Department website to find the office nearest your home <http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/isd/>.

The complete U.S. Census CPS report can be found at www.census.gov.

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