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Poverty Rate in NM Holds Steady in 2009

U.S. Census Sees U.S. Poverty at Highest Level since 1994

Santa Fe, New Mexico – The 2009 U.S. Census' Current Population Survey (CPS) released today shows that nationally 14.3 percent of people were living in poverty, an increase of 1.1 percentage points from 2008. In 2009, 43.6 million people in the U.S. were in poverty, up from 39.8 million in 2008. One year estimates for poverty in New Mexico remained unchanged, at 19.3 percent in both 2008 and 2009. A family of four earning less than \$22,050 is considered to be living in poverty.

“While our poverty rate in New Mexico remained unchanged in 2009, we have continued to see more people accessing our income support offices,” said Kathryn Falls, Human Services Department Secretary. “This may be because we already have a higher rate of poverty than most other states at 19.3 percent versus the national average of 14.3 percent. People accessing state and federally-funded programs for cash assistance, food, energy assistance and medical benefits have continued to grow each month since January 2009. For example, in July of 2009, approximately 74,000 people visited our Income Support Division field offices to apply for assistance while in July, 2010, the number of people coming into those same offices increased to over 80,000.”

In the past 12 months, the Human Services Department has had an 11.3 percent increase in participation in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (cash assistance) with 20,768 families now using the program. Family participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) has grown by 23.9 percent over the same period to 165,089 families over the same period.

Using the three year poverty average released by the U.S. census for 2007 – 2009, the percentage of people living in poverty in New Mexico was 17.5 percent, compared to 16.7 percent in 2006 – 2008. The three year average is lower than the one year annual figure for New Mexico because poverty has increased here in the past two years. New Mexico has the fourth highest rate in the U.S. behind Mississippi (21.3 percent), Arizona (17.8 percent) and the District of Columbia (17.5 percent).

People wanting more information about cash, food and energy assistance available through the department's 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/>.

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