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## Poverty Rates Rise Substantially in Wisconsin Increase Demands a Comprehensive *Vision*

**Madison** – U.S. Census Bureau reports released today show the rate of Wisconsinites living in poverty rose significantly in the last year. The Census Bureau’s American Community Survey results reveal that the poverty rate for all Wisconsin residents rose from 10.2 percent in 2005 to 11.0 percent in 2006 and the child poverty rate increased as well, from 13.9 percent in 2005 to 14.9 percent in 2006. Overall, more than 581,000 Wisconsin residents (including 192,000 children) lived in poverty in 2006. The federal poverty level for a family of four in 2006 was \$20,000.

“These figures should be a wake-up call for policy makers,” said WCCF Executive Director Charity Eleson. “The effects of poverty are devastating for children and for all of our communities. These data make clear that Wisconsin, in spite of our many strengths, is not doing enough to ensure the prosperity of all of our state’s kids and to eliminate poverty.”

One glimmer of good news from today’s American Community Survey release is that 4,000 fewer children in Wisconsin were living in extreme poverty in 2006 than in 2005, though the total number of Wisconsin kids living at this level still stands at an alarming 80,000. Extreme poverty is defined as income less than 50% of the federal poverty threshold (\$10,000/year for a family of four in 2006).

The results also reveal a 3.5 percent increase in the median household income level, from \$47,105 in 2005 to \$48,772 in 2006. Median household income for African Americans actually fell from \$26,318 to \$26,161 while the median income for Whites rose from \$49,244 to \$50,794.

“The slight increase in household income is encouraging, however it’s clear that all families in Wisconsin are not enjoying this prosperity equally. The overall increase in the rate of poverty combined with the decline in median income for some of our state’s families of color indicates that poverty persists in our state despite relatively strong economic growth,” said Eleson. “The economic recovery has not trickled down equally to all of Wisconsin’s households or to all of our struggling families.”

The new data also reveals that families are more likely to be living in poverty: 12.4 percent of families with children under age 18 are living in poverty, up from 11.5 in 2005. And fully 32.5 percent of Wisconsin’s African American families and 24.3 percent of Wisconsin’s Hispanic families are living below the poverty level. Both of these rates of poverty have increased from the 2005 figures.

As has been the case in years past as well, educational attainment remains a significant indicator of poverty status. Nearly 30 percent of those with a high school education or less live in poverty, compared to only 3 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or more who live in poverty.

“Ensuring that all children have access to quality early care and education, preserving funding for K-12 education, and ensuring that low-income parents have access to affordable higher education and skills training are all critically important to moving families out of poverty,” Eleson said.

Eleson added, “More than ever, these data reveal that we need a coordinated and strategic plan to end child poverty in our state. The Vision 2020 campaign (a partnership between WCCF, the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association and the Wisconsin Head Start Association) provides a visionary yet practical approach to ending child poverty and a great way for public officials, citizens and organizations to get involved in a tangible, focused way. Despite hard work, too many Wisconsin families do not have access to secure jobs that pay enough to rise out of poverty, opportunities for high quality early learning, or safe and affordable housing. We can address these issues and Vision 2020 gives us a path to do so.”

**Recommendations:**

- Education and training that meets the specific needs of Wisconsin families and new businesses by providing targeted training to potential employees.
- Improve the effectiveness of the state's economic development incentives for businesses to ensure the public investments made are producing family supporting jobs.
- Continue to find ways to reach the more than 550,000 uninsured people in Wisconsin.
- Support and improve policies that help negate the effects of poverty on children, specifically quality early education opportunities for every child in Wisconsin.
- Maintain Wisconsin's critical income support programs, including child care tuition assistance, BadgerCare and Medicaid, the refundable Earned Income Tax Credit, Homestead Tax Credit, and food security programs.

Complete US Census Data is available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

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*WCCF: Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count*