

News Release



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WILL WORK FOR EQUALITY

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New report shows high rates of unemployment and economic uncertainty for women who maintain families in Pennsylvania

The Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania and the Institute for Women's Policy Research's study findings call for better targeting of job creation programs and poverty relief to families headed by women

Pittsburgh, PA – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - A new Briefing Paper, *The Female Face of Poverty and Economic Insecurity: The Impact of the Recession in Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh MSA*, produced by the Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania finds that more than four out of ten families headed by single mothers in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), and more than one in three in Pennsylvania, live in poverty. Single mothers have been impacted especially hard by the recession: the rate of unemployment for women who maintain households in Pennsylvania has more than doubled between 2007 and 2009, rising from 5.0 percent to 11.1 percent, over twice the rate for married men.

"We commissioned this study because of the stories we were hearing from social service providers throughout Pennsylvania, and women themselves. Our fears as to the devastating impact the recession has had on women and families are confirmed in this report. We need to, and can, adjust policy to better serve single mothers and their families," said Heather Arnet, Executive Director of the Women and Girls Foundation of Southern Pennsylvania.

"The findings in this report point to the need for federal and state recovery efforts to focus on increasing investments in supporting single mother workforce development and placement programs," continued Arnet. "There needs to be a heightened focus on ensuring that ARRA worksites are accessible to single parents, offering and enforcing family-friendly work policies and inclusive recruitment strategies."

While employment is not a guaranteed route out of poverty for single mothers, it is a beginning. On average, women in Pittsburgh MSA earn only 74.6 percent what men earn, and this ratio worsens for women of color (64.2 percent for African American women and 65.6 percent for Latina women). The gender wage gap in both Pittsburgh MSA and Pennsylvania is worse than the national gender wage gap (77.1). Poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable and accessible child care, and the gender wage gap put female-headed households with children at a severe economic disadvantage.

As a mark of how many families are struggling, food stamp enrollment has increased steeply since 2007, by 25% in Allegheny County, and 31% in Pennsylvania. Yet during the same period, the number of families enrolled in TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) has remained the same in Allegheny County, and has grown by 8.4% in Pennsylvania. The slow growth in enrollment suggests that families that should benefit from financial assistance are not receiving it.

“Many families are suffering economic hardship, but families maintained by women face higher rates of poverty and higher rates of unemployment than other families in Pittsburgh MSA and throughout the state of Pennsylvania,” Ariane Hegewisch, a Study Director at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, said.

The Briefing Paper provides recommendations that would increase economic security for working families in Pennsylvania without requiring high levels of new investment from the state. Increasing investments from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act into job opportunities, especially for women who head households, while also training employers on equal employment opportunity law enforcement to protect women’s rights on the job, are federal solutions that would not place a significant burden on the state. Additionally, expanding family-friendly workplaces by incorporating paid sick and family leave and better access to child care will help ensure that women gain access to higher paying, more flexible jobs that allow women to meet their family responsibilities while providing a stable income. *The Female Face of Poverty* report asserts that removing barriers to economic security faced by women will help to alleviate poverty in Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania as a whole, and provide a better economic future for women and families.

To view the report online, go to: www.iwpr.org/pdf/R345PApoverty.pdf

To view a free webcast of Thursday’s Press Conference in Harrisburg, visit:
<http://cmsmedia.state.pa.us/treasury/registration.html>

The Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania (WGF) is an independent community-based foundation serving eleven counties in Southwest Pennsylvania. Our mission is to achieve equity for women and girls in the region. The Women and Girls Foundation promotes social change in our region by addressing fundamental social inequalities and raising the awareness of these inequities to the media, to voters, to legislators, and corporate and non-profit decision makers. By serving as an independent and clear voice, the foundation strives to bring together women and men in our region to work together to find solutions to create sustained equity for all of its citizens. For more information, visit www.wgfpa.org or call 412/434-4883.

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR’s work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women’s studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University. For more information, visit www.iwpr.org or call 202/785-5100.