

2022



NEW JERSEY TRUE POVERTY TRACKER

A POVERTY BENCHMARKS REPORT SERIES

Legal Services of New Jersey



Poverty Research Institute

About Legal Services of New Jersey and Its Poverty Research Institute

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) heads the 55-year-old statewide Legal Services system, consisting of six nonprofit corporations providing free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people in all 21 counties. The Poverty Research Institute (PRI) was created by LSNJ's co-founder and former President Melville "De" Miller, Jr. in 1997 to assemble data and other information that would assist in the organization's mission of providing civil legal aid. Such information can pinpoint the location, demographics, and other aspects of poverty, helping fashion more effective and efficient legal responses and solutions. Periodically, as a public service, LSNJ publishes reports and statistics gleaned from this data to enhance public awareness of poverty's scope, causes, consequences, and remedies. Greater knowledge about poverty can produce public policy decisions that alleviate some of the legal problems of those living in poverty's grasp, and thereby further serve LSNJ's core mission. PRI is New Jersey's first entity exclusively focused on developing and updating information on poverty in the state.

To offer comments or ideas in response to this report, please email sprasad@lsnj.org. For information about LSNJ, visit www.lsnj.org. To reach LSNJLAWSM Statewide Hotline, go to www.lsnjlaw.org. To support pro bono civil legal assistance, go to www.probononj.org. To donate and support LSNJ's work, go to www.lsnj.org/SupportOurWork. To volunteer your time to assist LSNJ, go to www.lsnj.org/Volunteer.

NEW JERSEY TRUE POVERTY TRACKER

A Report on Populations Experiencing
Deprivation in New Jersey

A “Poverty Benchmarks” Report Series

Legal Services of New Jersey
Poverty Research Institute

September 2022

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Acknowledgments

This report is a collaborative product of Legal Services of New Jersey's (LSNJ) Poverty Research Institute (PRI). Since 1997, PRI has endeavored to weave the information and perspective derived from Legal Services' statewide system of legal representation and advocacy with government and social science data, as a way to highlight and bring awareness, while bearing witness to the prevalence, extent, characteristics, harm and consequences of, and potential remedies for True Poverty in New Jersey. PRI Director Shivi Prasad, and Senior Researchers and Policy Analysts Arnela Ombasic and Janna Driskel were responsible for data gathering, analysis, and writing. Harvey Fisher provided editorial wisdom from the inception to completion of the project.

LSNJ is especially grateful to The Fund for New Jersey for substantial grant assistance for this report.

All perspectives are those of Legal Services of New Jersey.

*Dawn K. Miller, Esq.
President, Legal Services of New Jersey
September 2022
Edison, New Jersey*

1. Introduction

A. Overview

PRI is releasing this report to establish a baseline to assess the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) to be released by the U.S. Census Bureau on September 15, 2022. It is important to note that the ACS 2020 (one-year estimates) released last year was deemed “experimental” because the data products did not meet the Census Bureau’s Statistical Quality Standards—primarily the effect of data collection disruptions caused by the pandemic. Therefore, this report uses data from ACS 2019.

This report is intended to serve as a reminder of the economic situation prevailing in New Jersey before the pandemic. As is well recognized—in March of 2020—COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges not experienced in over 100 years. Yet, this report reveals that too many New Jerseyans were teetering on the edge even before the pandemic. While this report provides a baseline for assessing new data, it is important to state at the outset that the new data to be released by the U.S. Census Bureau will only provide initial insights on the effects of the pandemic. This is because of the lag embedded in the Census data collection process; the 2021 ACS will cover only the 23-month period from January 2019 to November 2020.

B. Background

This report provides a comprehensive overview of True Poverty in New Jersey in 2019, the latest year for which quality data is available from the U.S. Census Bureau.¹ True Poverty Level or TPL, as detailed in LSNJ’s True Poverty report issued in 2021, is the minimum income families need to afford basic necessities without any public or private support, and without making trade-offs.² For New Jerseyans, that level is three times the official poverty measure or 300% FPL, and is largely attributable to the high cost of living in the state. The statistics revealed in the report show vast disproportionalities in the experience of poverty by age, gender, family composition, race, and ethnicity. It reveals that New Jerseyans experiencing deprivation lack consistent access to critical realms of life such as housing, education, food, health care, transportation and internet access.

C. Note on Poverty

Poverty derives from complex social and economic dynamics, and data that describes manifestations of poverty should not be used to draw conclusions about causes of poverty. Rather, in portraying poverty’s effects, the data presents the public and policy makers with information necessary to fashion a comprehensive and effective approach to addressing poverty. Tracking this data over time will allow policy makers to gauge the state’s effectiveness in addressing poverty. While the data itself does not reveal root causes of poverty, it is important to recognize that disparities in the experience of poverty are rooted in systemic and structural barriers to economic and life opportunities.

D. The Poverty Benchmarks Series

Legal Services of New Jersey’s Poverty Research Institute (PRI) inaugurated the Poverty Benchmarks series in 2007 to provide a single source of all poverty-related information in the state, thereby illuminating the extent and consequences of poverty. Since then, nine such reports have been published. This report is the 10th in the series.

By making a broad array of data readily available, the Poverty Benchmarks series intends to stimulate awareness of the plight of people who are not able to afford basic necessities in New Jersey. LSNJ’s Poverty Research Institute believes that broad awareness of information concerning poverty is a precondition to lasting change. Before there can be effective solutions, society must share a common understanding and resolve to address the challenge and change the conditions of poverty. Studies like the Poverty Benchmarks series seek to build such an understanding.

Data Sources & Definitions

For consistency—and to allow comparison—this report uses data extracted from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) data. We also use data produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

- All data points reference ACS 2019 unless otherwise noted.
- 2019 is the most recent quality data available through the U.S. Census Bureau. ACS 2020 (one-year estimates) did not meet the Census Bureau’s data quality standards because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection.
- True Poverty statistics refer to the population living below 300% FPL.
- The report uses the U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of race and ethnicity. Note that the Census Bureau collects race data according to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget guidelines. Data is based on self-identification.
- This report provides detailed poverty data on four major racial and ethnic groups predominant in New Jersey: white, Black or African American, Asian, and Hispanic or Latino. The first three exclude individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin. Hispanic or Latinos, on the other hand, can be of any race. The terms Black or African American are used interchangeably throughout the report, along with the terms Hispanic or Latino.

E. Tracking True Poverty

With this report, PRI advances the use of data at 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as the real determinant of True Poverty in the state. As noted, 300% FPL is—on average—the rock bottom for the majority of families to afford basic necessities and survive with dignity without any public or private support and without making tradeoffs. For a family of three—one parent and two children—this converts to an annual income of \$70,372, compared to the federal poverty income threshold of \$20,598. Individuals and families with incomes below 300% of the FPL

experience significant deprivation in at least one of the critical need areas, and are forced to make trade-offs between essential needs. Previous versions of the report used a conservative estimate of True Poverty at 250% FPL, while recognizing that most families needed a higher amount.

2. Main Findings

1. Nearly 2.9 million, or 33.3 percent, of New Jersey residents experienced deprivation in 2019.
2. Forty-two percent of children in New Jersey experienced deprivation in 2019. Children of color had a True Poverty rate three times higher than children who were white or Asian.
3. Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino residents experienced deprivation at double the rate of their non-Hispanic white and Asian neighbors.
4. There is a considerable wage gap by race and ethnicity. For every dollar earned by a white worker in 2019, Hispanic or Latino workers made 69 cents, and Black or African American workers made 74 cents.
5. Households with children experienced higher rates of True Poverty. These differences were most severe for single female-headed households. Seventy percent of households headed by a single female experienced deprivation.
6. Differences were even more drastic for households headed by Hispanic and Black females. Eighty-three percent of Hispanic and 77 percent of Black single female-headed households with children experienced True Poverty, while 53 percent of white single female-headed households lived in True Poverty.
7. The majority of households in True Poverty (60 Percent) rented their home. Half of renter households in True Poverty spent more than 46 percent of their income on rent.
8. The uninsured rate for New Jerseyans in True Poverty was three times higher than for residents living above True Poverty.
9. Many New Jersey households in True Poverty lacked access to technology. Just under one-fifth did not have internet access; nearly one-fourth did not have a smart phone; and more than half did not have a portable computer.

3. Key Terms

True Poverty	True Poverty refers to 300% of the FPL. In New Jersey, this is the minimum income the majority of families need to afford basic needs, without public or private support, and without making tradeoffs.
Federal Poverty	Official poverty measure or 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)
Deprivation	The term is used interchangeably with True Poverty
Unemployed	People are classified as unemployed if they do not have a job, have been actively looking for work in the prior four weeks, and are currently available for work.
Labor Force	The labor force is made up of individuals who are employed and unemployed. (Employed individuals include those who worked for pay or profit).
Unemployment Rate	The share of unemployed as a percentage of total labor force.
Rate	Rate refers to the percent of people of a specific group with a specific characteristic or circumstance. For instance, the True Poverty rate for children refers to number of children below True Poverty as a percent of all children.
Share	Share looks at the universe of poverty population or the universe of total population separately. For instance, share of Hispanic persons in True Poverty will look at the total individuals in True Poverty and then divide it by race.

4. Who is Living in True Poverty?

This section highlights the disproportionate impact of True Poverty on certain population groups. It shows that while deprivation can impact anyone, some demographic groups have a higher likelihood of experiencing poverty. The analysis also shows that having multiple experiences—such as being a child and a person of color—increases vulnerability to poverty.

A. True Poverty in New Jersey

According to LSNJ’s research, on average, New Jerseyans need at least 300% FPL to avoid deprivation. Although New Jersey is one of the most affluent states in the country—with the third-highest median income in the United States at \$85,751³—2,898,437 residents were unable to afford the costs of basic needs.

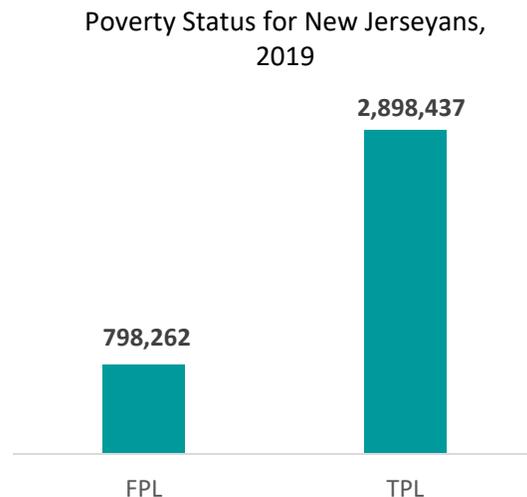
Nearly 2.9 million, or 33.3 percent of New Jerseyans, lived in True Poverty in 2019—one-third of the state’s residents.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Federal poverty statistics failed to count two million New Jerseyans experiencing deprivation.

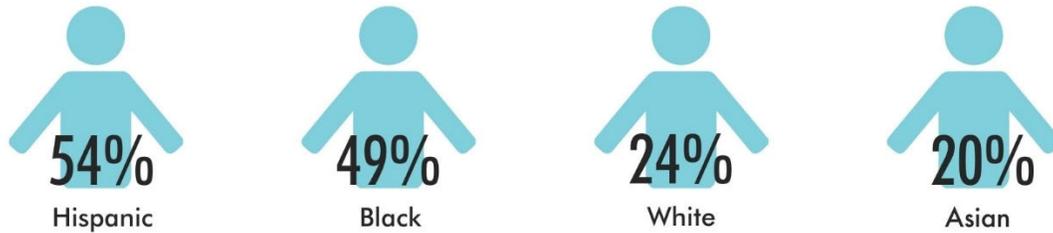
The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) grossly understates the income required for New Jerseyans to meet basic needs. In 2019, the FPL showed that 9.2 percent of New Jerseyans, or approximately 800,000 residents, struggled financially to make ends meet. Based on the TPL, 2.9 million residents lived in deprivation—essentially meaning that approximately two million New Jersey residents were overlooked in the federal poverty counts.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

B. Race and Ethnicity

Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino New Jerseyans experienced True Poverty at double the rate of their non-Hispanic white and Asian neighbors.

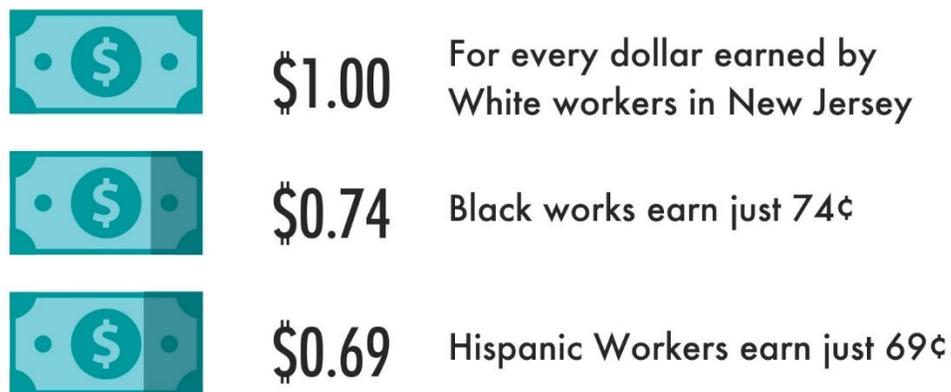


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Around half of Hispanic and Black New Jerseyans lived in True Poverty, compared to just under a quarter of white New Jerseyans and a fifth of Asian New Jerseyans.

There were significant wage disparities by race and ethnicity.

In New Jersey, Hispanic or Latino workers made 69 cents for every dollar that white workers earned. Workers who were Black or African American made 74 cents for every dollar that white workers earned.⁴



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, 2019

C. Gender

Females in New Jersey had a higher rate of True Poverty than males, considering all age groups.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

The True Poverty rate for females in New Jersey was three percentage points higher than for males. As a result, around 200,000 more females experienced True Poverty than males.

Females faced significant wage disparities in New Jersey.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, 2019

Women, as a group, earn less than men in New Jersey.

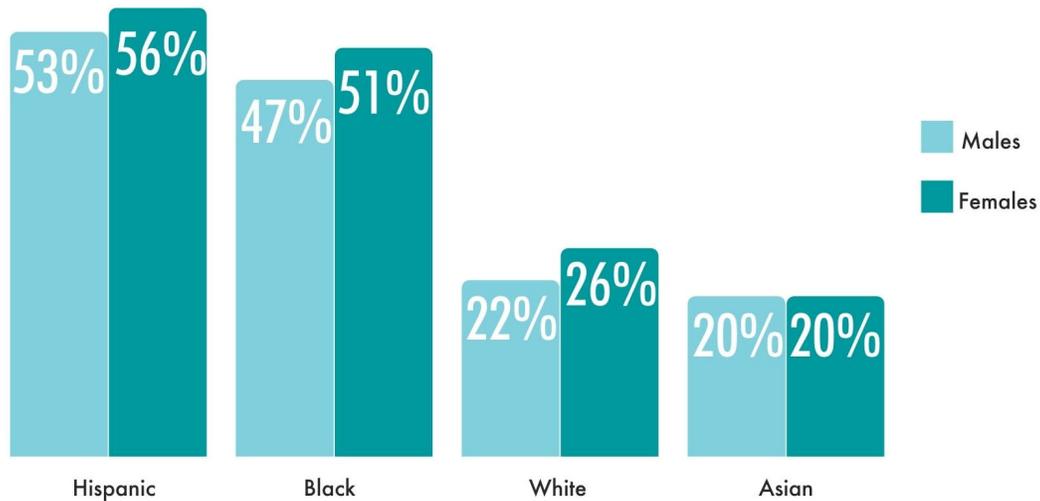
Females aged 18 to 64 experienced greater rates of True Poverty than their male counterparts.

Nearly 28 percent of adult males live in True Poverty compared to around 32 percent of adult females—a 4 percentage point gap.

The True Poverty rates for Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American females were nearly double the rates for white and Asian women. This held true for males as well.

Hispanic and Black females had the highest True Poverty rates at 56 percent and 51 percent, respectively. Hispanic and Black males also experienced high True Poverty rates at 53 percent and 47 percent. Asian males and females had the lowest True Poverty levels at 20 percent. The True Poverty rates for Hispanic and Black males and females were approximately double the rates for their white and Asian peers.

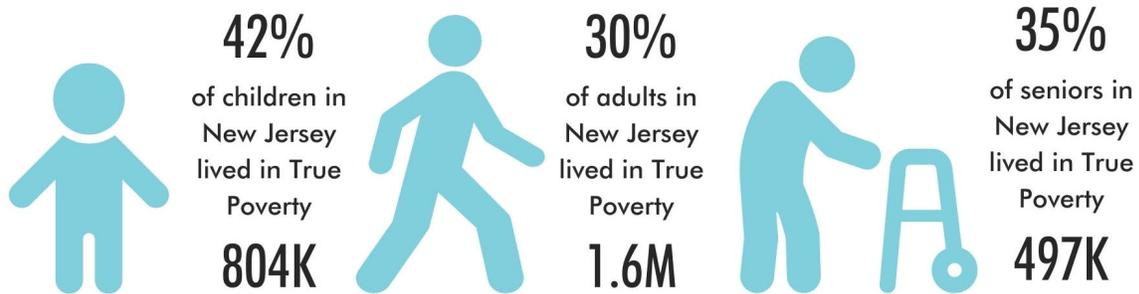
Poverty Rate by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

D. Age

Children in New Jersey experienced the highest rate of True Poverty among all age groups.

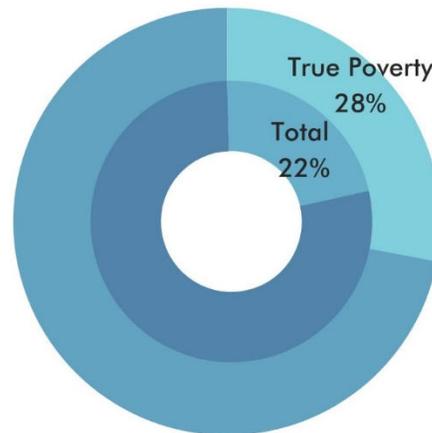


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Children faced the highest True Poverty rate among all age groups, at 42 percent. More than a third of seniors in the state lived in True Poverty, compared to 30 percent of adults.

Children disproportionately lived in True Poverty.

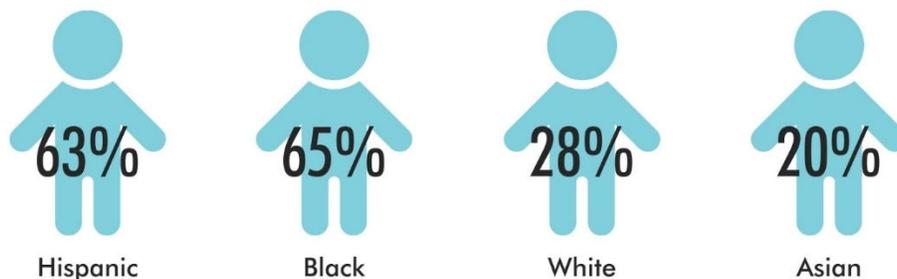
Share of Children in Population and True Poverty, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

While children made up just 22 percent of the total population, they represented 28 percent of persons in True Poverty.

Black and Hispanic children had a True Poverty rate three times higher than their white and Asian peers.



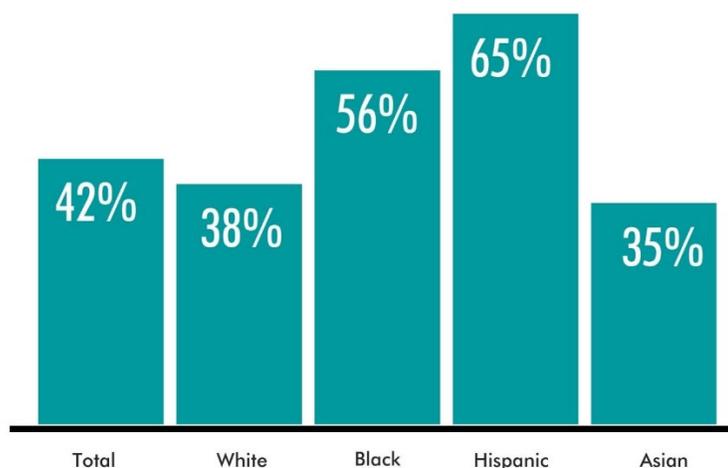
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Black and Hispanic children experienced the highest True Poverty rates. In fact, about two-thirds of Hispanic (63 percent) and Black children (65 percent) experienced True Poverty compared to 28 percent of white children and 20 percent of Asian children.

The oldest among seniors were most vulnerable to True Poverty, especially for persons of color.

Persons over 75 experienced True Poverty at a higher rate than the general senior population. Around 42 percent of individuals over 75 lived in True Poverty, compared to 35 percent of all persons over 65—a 7-percentage point gap. Black and Hispanic New Jerseyans over 75 faced much higher True Poverty rates— 56 and 65 percent, respectively. In comparison, white and Asian New Jerseyans had True Poverty rates of 38 and 35 percent, respectively. This represents a 20 to 30-percentage point gap.

True Poverty Rate for Individuals over 75 by Race and Ethnicity, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

E. Family Composition

Households with children had higher True Poverty rates than households without children.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

The True Poverty rate for households with children was 17 percentage points higher than for households without children.

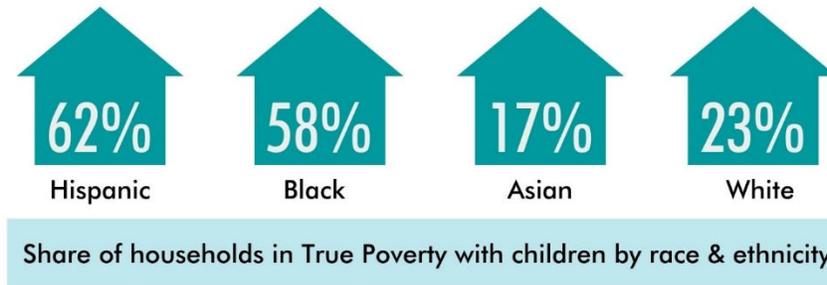
Single-female headed households with children faced greater True Poverty rates than married couple households with children.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Seventy percent of single-female headed households lived in True Poverty compared to 24 percent of married-couple households.

Among households with children, Black and Hispanic households were more likely to live in True Poverty.

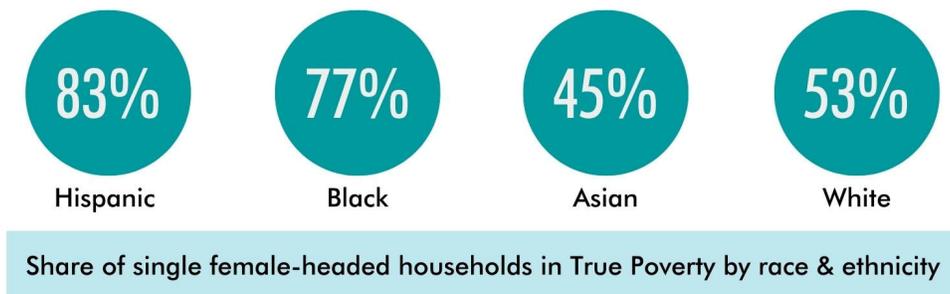


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Black and Hispanic families with children experienced poverty at approximately three times that of white and Asian families. Sixty-two percent of Hispanic and 58 percent of Black families with children experienced True Poverty compared to 23 percent of white and 17 percent of Asian families with children.

A large majority of single female-headed households with children headed by Hispanic and Black women experienced True Poverty.

In 2019, 83 percent of Hispanic and 77 percent of Black single female-headed households with children experienced True Poverty. In contrast, 45 percent of Asian and 53 percent of white single female-headed households with children experienced True Poverty.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

F. Disability Status

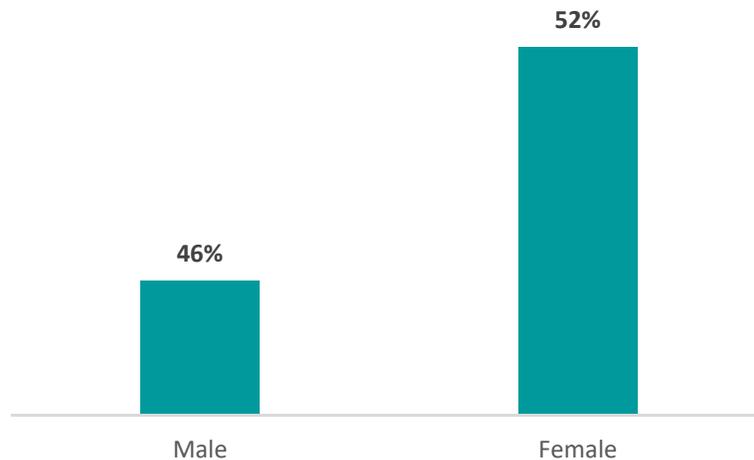
Half of New Jerseyans with a disability lived in True Poverty.



New Jerseyans with a disability lived in True Poverty

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

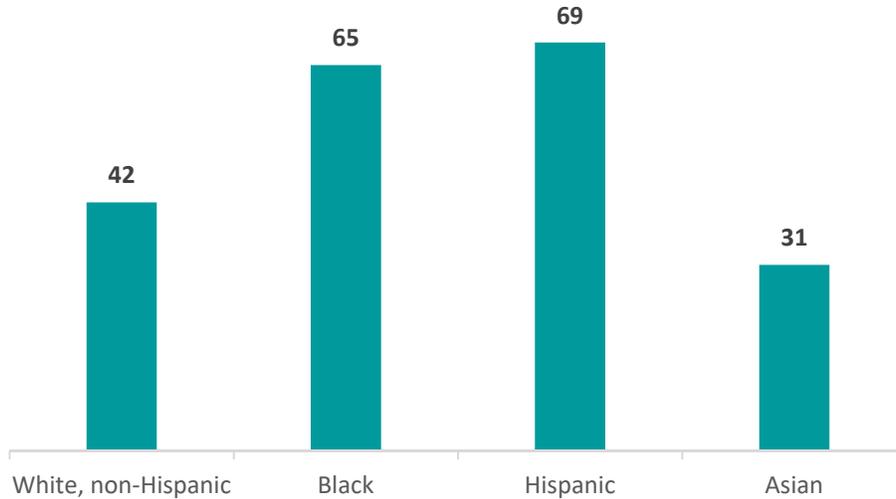
More women with a disability experienced True Poverty than men.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

In 2019, 193,727, or 46, percent of men with a disability lived in True Poverty versus 252,651, or 52 percent, of women.

A very large majority of Hispanic and Black New Jerseyans with a disability lived in True Poverty.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Sixty-nine percent of Hispanic and 65 percent of Black New Jerseyans with a disability experienced True Poverty in 2019. In contrast, 42 percent of non-Hispanic white individuals and 31 percent of Asian individuals with a disability experienced True Poverty in 2019.

5. Harmful Effects of True Poverty

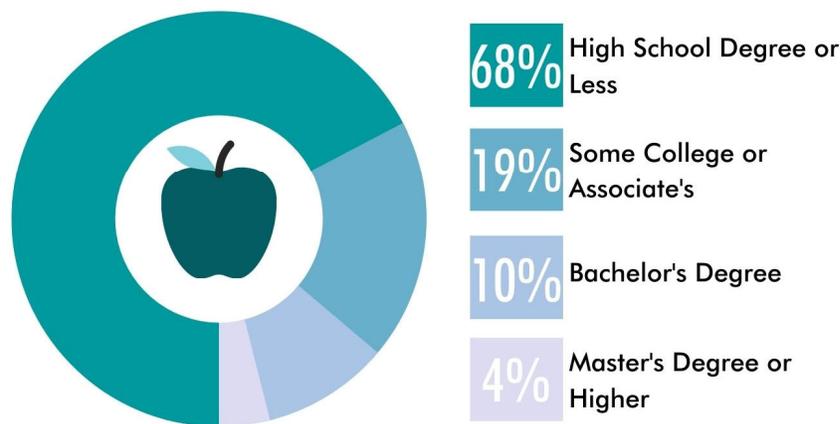
The experience of True Poverty leads to significant hardships and deprivations. It adversely affects all realms of life, creating a harmful cycle of barriers that impact short-term survival and long-term self-sufficiency. The one-third of New Jerseyans who experienced True Poverty in 2019 faced numerous challenges in accessing basic needs. While the impacts of poverty can be varied and widespread, the analysis in this section addresses access to essential resources such as education, housing, health care, food, transportation, and technology. It shows that persons in True Poverty are less likely to attain higher levels of education; own their homes; have enough to eat (food security); have access to health insurance; own their own car; or have access to the internet—making it even more challenging to escape deprivation.

A. Education

Individuals with lower levels of education are more likely to live in True Poverty. At the same time, living in poverty often predicts the quality of education a person attains.

Individuals with lower levels of education made up the majority of persons in True Poverty in New Jersey.

Share of Individuals in True Poverty by Educational Attainment, 2019

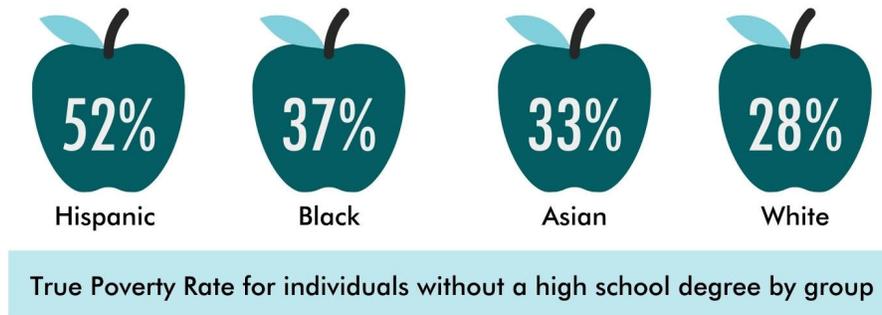


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Individuals with a high school degree or less represented the largest share of people experiencing True Poverty—at 68 percent. New Jerseyans with some college or an associate’s degree made up 19 percent. The smallest share of persons in True Poverty had a college degree or higher, as 10 percent had a bachelor’s degree and just 4 percent had a master’s degree or higher.

B. Educational Attainment by Race and Ethnicity

Hispanic and Black New Jerseyans without a high school diploma faced a higher True Poverty rate than their white and Asian peers.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Hispanic or Latino New Jerseyans without a high school degree experienced the highest True Poverty rate—with more than half, or 52 percent, living in deprivation. Black or African American individuals without a high school diploma faced the next highest True Poverty rate at 37 percent. White and Asian individuals without a high school degree had True Poverty rates of 28 and 33 percent, respectively.

C. Housing

The majority of households in True Poverty—60 percent—rented their home.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

A greater share of households experiencing deprivation rented instead of owned their home. Overall, 60 percent rented their home, while just 40 percent owned their home.

D. Housing Unaffordability

For New Jersey households, rental costs were far too high, leaving little for other basic needs.



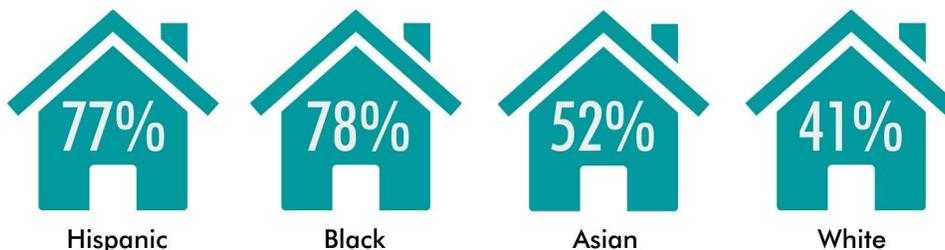
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

The high cost of housing in New Jersey means that many spent a large share of their income on housing. This is especially true for households experiencing True Poverty. Half of New Jersey renters in True Poverty spent over 46 percent of their income on rent; and 20 percent spent nearly 90 percent of their income on rent alone. New Jersey had the third highest median gross rent in the continental United States—with a median gross rent of \$1,376 per month.⁵

E. Housing Disparities

For households in True Poverty, a higher share of households of color rented their homes.

Renter Rate for Households in True Poverty by Race & Ethnicity, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

A much greater share of Hispanic and Black households rented their homes at 77 percent and 78 percent, respectively. In comparison, just 41 percent of white households and 52 percent of Asian household in True Poverty rent their homes.

F. Health Insurance

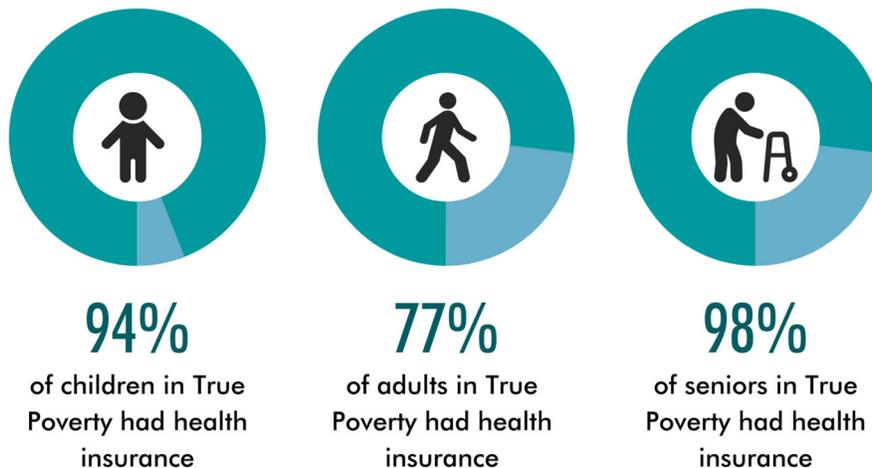
The uninsured rate for New Jerseyans in True Poverty was three times higher than for residents living above True Poverty.

While most individuals in True Poverty had health insurance, 15 percent lacked coverage, compared to just 5 percent of individuals living above True Poverty.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Among all age groups in True Poverty, adults (18-64) had the lowest rate of health insurance coverage.

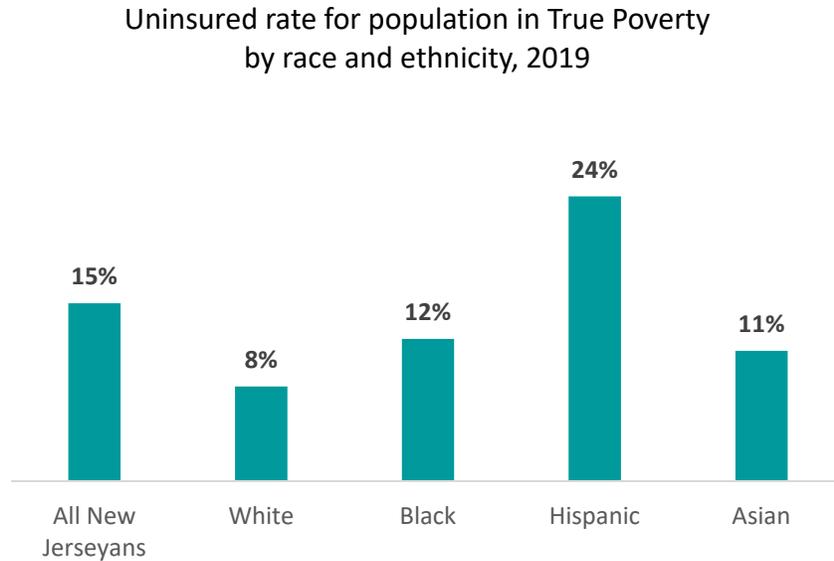


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

While the vast majority of children and seniors in New Jersey were covered by health insurance in 2019, the same was not true for adults. Just 77 percent of adults had health insurance coverage, leaving 23 percent uninsured.

G. Health Insurance by Race and Ethnicity

Significant racial and ethnic disparities existed in health insurance coverage. Hispanic New Jerseyans in True Poverty experienced at least double the uninsured rate of their peers.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Twenty-four percent Hispanic New Jerseyans in True Poverty lacked health coverage compared to 12 percent of Black, 11 percent of Asian, and 8 percent of white residents in deprivation.

H. Nutrition and Food Insecurity

Almost 8 percent of all households in New Jersey experienced food insecurity.

Almost eight percent of New Jersey households experienced food insecurity, while three percent experienced very low food security—as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017-19

Senior households faced lower, but substantial rates of food insecurity.



Source: Food Research and Action Center, 2017-19

The most recent data shows that 11.3 percent of children in New Jersey lived in food insecure homes.

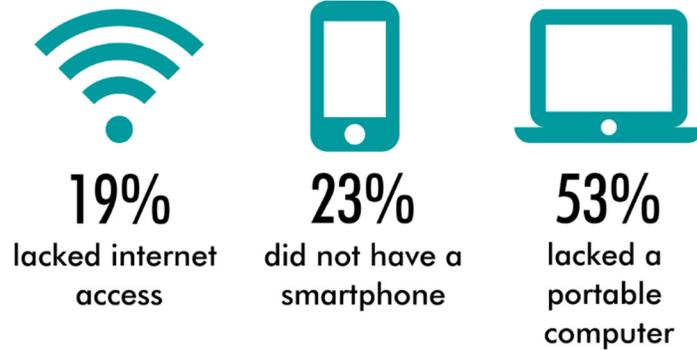


of all new Jersey's children
experienced food insecurity

Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2018

I. Access to Technology

Households in True Poverty lacked access to technology.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

Many New Jersey households in True Poverty lacked access to technology. Nineteen percent did not have internet access; 23 percent did not have a smart phone; and 53 percent did not have a computer.*

J. Transportation: Vehicle Ownership

A quarter of New Jerseyans in True Poverty did not have a car.

Car ownership is vital to New Jersey's working economy. However, 25 percent of persons in True Poverty did not own a vehicle.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1-Year ACS PUMS, 2019

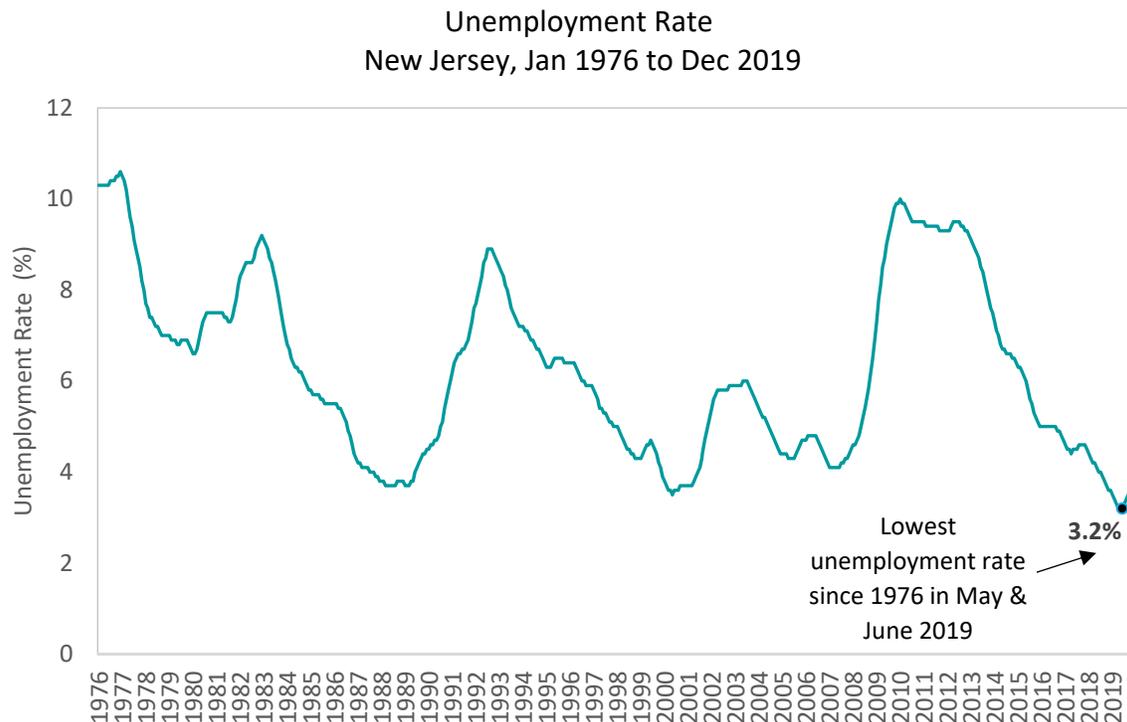
** The U.S. Census Bureau questionnaire specifically asks about access to a tablet or other portable computer. Thus, computer in this context denotes a tablet or other portable computer.

6. Employment and Wages

A. Employment

One-third of New Jerseyans continued to experience deprivation despite a booming economy—New Jersey recorded the lowest unemployment rate since 1976 in 2019.

In 2019, while one-third of New Jersey’s population experienced True Poverty, New Jersey reported the lowest unemployment rate recorded since 1976.



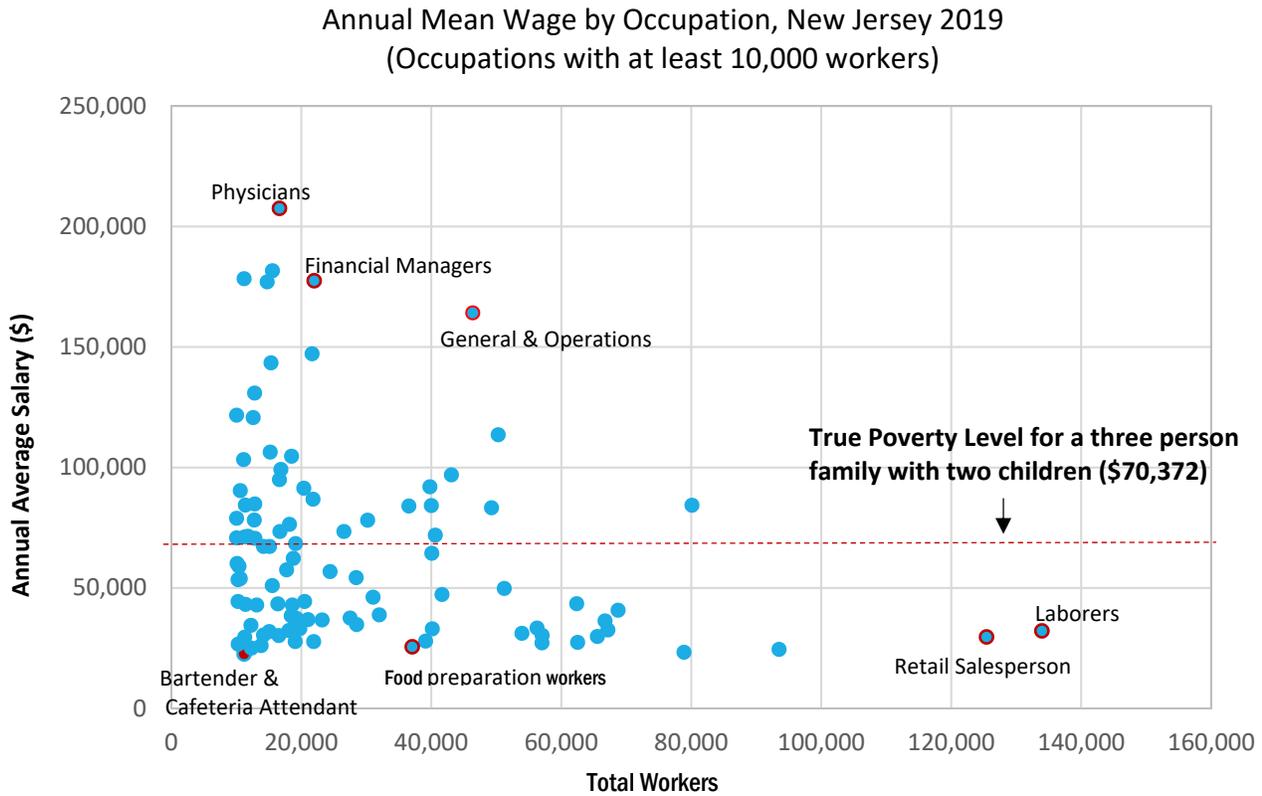
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Work was not always enough to make ends meet due to the high cost of living in the state.

For too many New Jerseyans, wages fell far below what is needed to afford basic needs. Working New Jerseyans struggled to make ends meet due to the high cost of living in the state. In 2019, the Bureau of Economic Analysis reported New Jersey had the third highest living costs in the United States, after Hawaii and District of Columbia⁶.

B. Wages

Annual mean wages for the majority of large occupations in New Jersey fell below amounts needed to afford basic necessities in 2019.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics

In 2019, nearly 2.9 million individuals were employed in 99 occupations with 10,000 or more workers. Of this, the annual wages of more than 68 percent of occupations were less than the TPL for a family of three with two children in 2019 (\$70,372). Wages were less than \$25,000 annually for occupations such as fast food and counter workers, cafeteria attendants, bartender helpers, and cashiers.

Industries with the lowest wages were the largest employers and grew the most.

Occupations with the lowest wages had the largest number of workers in 2019. The food preparation industry had the lowest median annual wage of \$24,180 while employing 312,960 workers in 2019. Personal care and service, building and grounds maintenance, and health care support occupations paid nearly 410,000 workers less than \$31,000 annually in 2019. Further, during the past decade, the industries with the lowest wages have grown the most. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows the lowest paying industries, such as the non-professional service and health care sectors, grew between 6.9 percent and 14.6 percent from 2007 to 2019.

Higher numbers of individuals are employed in occupations with the lowest wages.

Annual Median Wage and Total Employment by Major Occupation Category, New Jersey 2019
(Occupations with 10,000 workers or more)

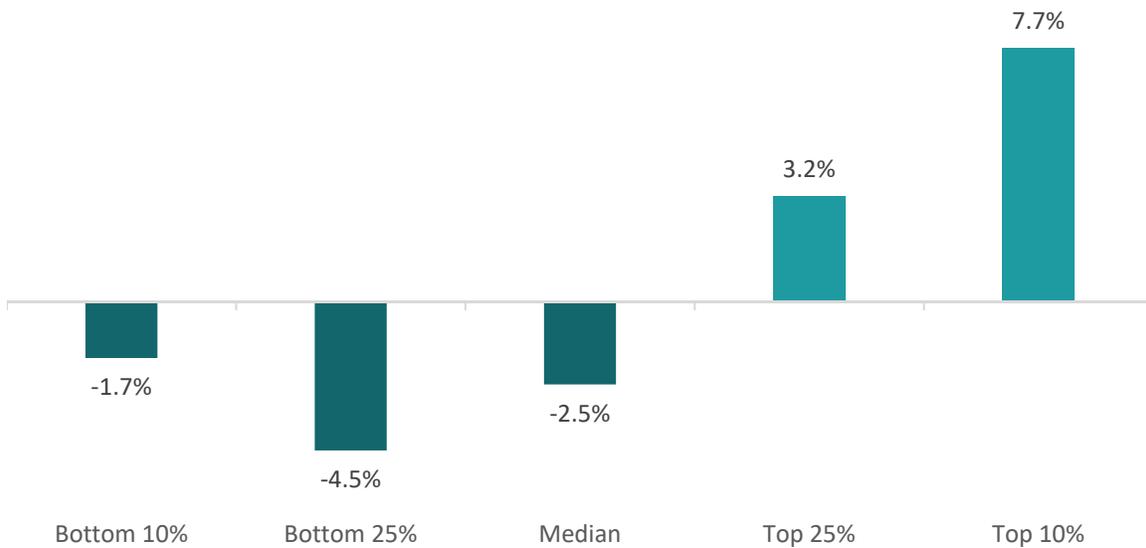


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics

Wages for the lowest income workers did not grow with inflation.

Wages have not grown with inflation, especially for the lowest income workers in the state. Those at the bottom 10 percent of the income spectrum earned less than \$21,270 annually in 2019—a decline of \$374 from 2001 after adjusting for inflation. Overall, wages for the lowest income workers declined by 1.7 percent. On the other hand, income for the top 10 percent of earners increased 7.7 percent or \$8,377 on average between 2001 and 2019 after adjusting for inflation. Incomes also increased for the top 25% of earners by 3.2 percent or \$2,355 on average, after adjusting for inflation.

Percent Change in Real Wages, New Jersey 2001 to 2019



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019

7. Concluding Remarks

Regardless of one’s political perspective, poverty compels public attention. Human suffering and deprivation of basic needs and opportunities offend universal values of compassion and concern. Ample evidence confirms poverty’s destabilizing effects on the social order and communal wellbeing. Significant costs attend the inevitable remedial efforts that must be taken in poverty’s wake, to address circumstances such as thwarted child development, persistent malnutrition, deteriorated health, broken families—the list continues and is daunting. Longer-term prevalent poverty impedes economic development, affecting labor supply and hindering future growth. Poverty cannot be ignored.

“Society must no longer accept status quo. We need to challenge the awful untruths about poverty. The stakes are high here; we can’t keep talking about poverty in the same way we always have been.”

Melville “De” Miller, Jr.
President, LSNJ, 1973-2020

Endnotes

¹ The 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year estimates did not meet the Census Bureau’s data quality standards because of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on data collection. The 2021 ACS one-year estimates will be release during fall 2022.

² See LSNJ’s Report on Poverty “True Poverty: What it Takes to Avoid Poverty and Deprivation in the Garden State” (July 2021). Available [here](#).

³ U.S. Census Bureau. “Median Income in the Past 12 Months.” 2019.

⁴ "Earnings Disparities by Race and Ethnicity." Department of Labor. Last modified, 2019. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/about/data/earnings/race-and-ethnicity>.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

⁶ “Regional Price Parities by State and Metro Area.” Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2019, <https://www.bea.gov/data/prices-inflation/regional-price-parities-state-and-metro-area>.