

MEDIA ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOUR KEY POINTS ABOUT THE UPCOMING CENSUS RELEASE

EDISON — The Poverty Research Institute (PRI) of Legal Services of New Jersey issues the following advisory:

On Wednesday and Thursday, September 16 and 17, the United States Census will issue two reports. The Current Population Survey (CPS) report, presenting national level data, will be publicly released at 10:00 a.m. on the 16th. State and county level data from the American Community Survey (ACS) will be embargoed until 12:01 a.m. on the 17th. Based upon other indicators, most notably employment and unemployment data, both national and New Jersey poverty rates (calculated at 100% of the federal poverty level, or FPL), are for the first time after six years of increases expected to level off and perhaps even decline slightly.

PRI suggests four key points be kept in mind in reviewing and reporting on this data:

- 1. The expected end to steady increased in poverty is most welcome, but draws attention away from the fact that New Jersey poverty rates remain at 50-year record highs.**

Starting in 2008 and continuing to 2013, New Jersey experienced record rates of increase in, and overall record levels and rates of poverty. The end to such increases expected to be documented in the 2014 data does not yet mark a significant decline in such levels and rates.

2. **The Census presentation portrays only roughly one-third (35%) of the real extent of actual poverty in New Jersey.**

Studies¹ confirm New Jersey's very high cost of living means that significant deprivation – **actual poverty** – occurs for all with incomes **below 250%** of the FPL – a cut off 2 ½ times higher than that used to generate the reported Census figures. Using 100% of FPL, in effect, excludes 65% of those actually experiencing poverty in the state.

3. **Census reporting time lags and availability of other more precise measures of particular types of deprivation make regular examination of other data sources essential to assess the full extent of poverty.**

An example underscores this point. Non-Census data show that New Jersey's level of **food insecurity** - a benchmark for measuring hunger and nutritional deprivation –

¹ *The Real Cost of Living in New Jersey – What It Takes to Meet Basic Needs and Avoid Deprivation* May 2013; *What is Poverty? Measurement Deprivation in New Jersey*, September 2014; both published by the Legal Services of New Jersey Poverty Research Institute and available at www.lsnj.org.

remains at record high levels. In the 13 periods² since the beginning of the new millennium, *very low food security* - depicting the most extreme deprivation – *doubled*, and the combined low and very low food security increased by 50%.

In early October PRI will release its annual *Poverty Benchmarks* report, reflecting most key non-Census data sources.

4. Understanding of changes in and effectiveness of anti-poverty programs is essential in evaluating poverty data.

A key example again demonstrates this observation. Calendar 2014, the period covered by this Census release, marked the first full year of the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), which expanded health insurance coverage. Lack of health insurance constitutes a well-documented contribution to poverty. The Census will afford the first data on health coverage expansion under ACA, providing important insight regarding this key program’s anti-poverty effect. Expectations are the data will reveal an extensive decline in the number of New Jersey’s uninsured.

PRI’s October *Poverty Benchmarks* report will offer data and effectiveness for most key federal and state anti-poverty programs at work in New Jersey

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² United States Department of Agriculture data using annual three-year rolling averages.