

## COMPILATION OF RECENT LEGAL MOMENTUM SINGLE MOTHER REPORTS

*Low Wage Rates and Low Income Very Common for Employed Single Mothers* (July 2012)  
<http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/low-wage-rates-and-low-income.pdf>.

*Single Motherhood in the United States – A Snapshot (2012)* (March 2012),  
<http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-snapshot.pdf>.

*Single Mother Poverty in the United States in 2010* (Sept. 2011),  
<http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mother-poverty-2010.pdf>

*Poverty Rates for Single Mothers Are Higher in the U.S. than in Other High-Income Countries* (June 2011), <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-poverty-higher-us.pdf>

*Single Mother Poverty Rates Remain Exceptionally High Even When Food Stamps and Earned Income Credits Are Counted* (June 2011) <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mother-poverty-fs-eic.pdf>

*Harmful House Food Stamp Proposal Poses an Especially Grave Threat to Single Mothers and Their Children* (May 2011), <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/house-food-stamps.pdf>.  
<http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/house-food-stamps.pdf>

*Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down* (January 2011)  
<http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>.

(July 2012)

## Low Wage Rates and Low Income Very Common for Employed Single Mothers

A recent study by economists at the University of Massachusetts examined low-wage and low income work in the United States over the thirty year period 1979-2009.<sup>1</sup> This study defined “low-wage” as an hourly wage less than two-thirds of the state median hourly wage, and “low income” as a family income less than 200% of the official poverty level. The study found that during these 30 years, 34% of employed single mothers were *both* working at a low-wage *and* in a family with a low income. The 34% rate for employed single mothers was almost triple the 12.5% rate for all employed persons, and almost double the 18% rate for employed single fathers. In 2009, the last year covered by this study, 39% of employed single mothers were in low-wage work, and 36% of employed single mothers were both low-wage and low income.<sup>2</sup>

There were similar findings in an earlier study of low wage work commissioned by the federal government.<sup>3</sup> This study found that 44% of employed single mothers were in low-wage work in 1996 defined by the study as an hourly wage less than \$7.50.

(July 2012. Contact Timothy Casey, [tcasey@legalmomentum.org](mailto:tcasey@legalmomentum.org), for further information.)

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<sup>1</sup> Albelda, Randy and Michael Carr. 2012. *Low-Wage and Low-Income Workers In the U.S., 1979-2009*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts, Center for Social Policy, Working Paper 2012-1. Available at [http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=csp\\_pubs](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=csp_pubs).

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication from Randy Albelda.

<sup>3</sup> Schochet, Peter and Anu Rangarajan. 2004. *Characteristics of Low-Wage Workers and Their Labor Market Experiences: Evidence from the Mid-to Late 1990s*. Submitted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/low-wage-workers04/report.pdf>.

## Single Motherhood in the United States – A Snapshot (2012)

**Prevalence:** Single motherhood is very common. Around half of today's mothers will spend at least some time as the sole custodial parent.<sup>1</sup> At any one time, almost one quarter of mothers are single mothers.<sup>2</sup>

**Characteristics:** Around 45% of single mothers have never married, around 55% are divorced, separated or widowed.<sup>3</sup> Half have one child, 30% have two.<sup>4</sup> About two fifths are White, one third Black, one quarter Hispanic.<sup>5</sup> One quarter have a college degree, one sixth have not completed high school.<sup>6</sup>

**Employment:** At any one time, about two thirds of single mothers are also working outside the home, a slightly greater share than the share of married mothers who are also working outside the home.<sup>7</sup> However, only two fifths of single mothers are employed full-time the entire year, and a quarter are jobless the entire year.<sup>8</sup>

**Income:** Half of single mother families have an annual income less than \$25,000.<sup>9</sup> Median income for single mother families is only one third the median for married couple families.<sup>10</sup> Only one third of single mothers receive any child support, and the average amount these mothers receive is only about \$300 a month.<sup>11</sup>

**Poverty:** Two fifths of single mother families are poor, triple the poverty rate for the rest of the population.<sup>12</sup> The majority of poor children are in single mother families.<sup>13</sup> Child poverty is linked to school dropout; to negative adult outcomes including joblessness and ill health; and to reduced economic output estimated to be about 4% of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>14</sup>

**Hardship:** Two fifths of single mother families are "food insecure,"<sup>15</sup> one seventh use food pantries,<sup>16</sup> one fifth have no health insurance,<sup>17</sup> one third spend more than half their income on housing.<sup>18</sup> Three quarters of homeless families are single mother families.<sup>19</sup>

**Welfare & Food Stamp Receipt:** Although two fifths of all single mothers are poor, only one tenth of all single mothers receive cash welfare assistance.<sup>20</sup> Two fifths of all single mothers receive Food Stamps.<sup>21</sup>

**Compared to Single Mothers in Peer Countries:** The single mother poverty rate in the U.S. is far above the average in high income countries<sup>22</sup> even though the single mother employment rate in the U.S. is also above the average.<sup>23</sup> Less generous income support programs in the U.S. help explain the exceptionally high poverty rate for single mother families in the U.S.<sup>24</sup>

(March 2012). (For further information, contact Timothy Casey, [tcasey@legalmomentum.org](mailto:tcasey@legalmomentum.org))

*This report supported in part by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.*

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, David Blau & Wilbert van der Klaauw, *What Determines Family Structure*, IZA DP No. 4912 (April 2010); David Blau & Wilbert van der Klaauw, *A Demographic Analysis of the Family Structure Experiences of Children in the United States*, IZA DP No. 3001 (August 2007); Patrick Heuveline et. al, *Shifting Childrearing To Single Mothers: Results From 17 Western Countries*, 29 *Population and Development Review* 47 – 71 (March 2003).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex: 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C3. Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years and Marital Status of Parents, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin and Selected Characteristics of the Child for All Children: 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

<sup>4</sup> The figures cited in the text are those for household heads in female-headed primary families with no spouse present and with related children under 18 as calculated by Legal Momentum using the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey Table Creator (CPS Table Creator) available at [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps\\_table\\_creator.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps_table_creator.html).

<sup>5</sup> Same source as in note 3.

<sup>6</sup> Same source as in note 4.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Characteristics of Families – 2010*, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Same source as in note 4.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table F-10. Presence of Children Under 18 Years Old by Median and Mean Income: 1974 to 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/families/>.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2009* (December 2011), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-240.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Legal Momentum, *Single Mother Poverty in the United States in 2010* (September 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mother-poverty-2010.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Center for American Progress, *The Economic Costs of Poverty in the United States – Subsequent Effects of Children Growing Up Poor* (2007), available at [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/pdf/poverty\\_report.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/pdf/poverty_report.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Same source as in note 12.

<sup>16</sup> Id.

<sup>17</sup> Same source as in note 4.

<sup>18</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, *The State Of The Nation's Housing 2011* (2011), available at <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/son2011.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Same source as in note 12.

<sup>20</sup> Legal Momentum, *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down* (January 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Janet Gornick & Markus Jantti, *Child Poverty in Upper-Income Countries: Lessons from the Luxembourg Income Study* (Revised May 2009), available at <http://www.lisdatacenter.org/wps/liswps/509.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Lane Destro & David Brady, *Does European-Style Welfare Generosity Discourage Single Mother Employment?* (August 2010), available at <http://www.lisproject.org/publications/liswps/548.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Same source as in note 22.

## **Single Mother Poverty in the United States in 2010**

Over one quarter of U.S. children under age 18 reside with only one of their parents,<sup>1</sup> and as many as half of U.S. children may reside in a single parent family at some point in their childhood.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority - over 85% - of single parents are single mothers.

Poverty is widespread and severe in single mother families. According to the recently released Census Bureau data on poverty in 2010, people in single mother families had a poverty rate of 42.2% and an extreme poverty rate of 21.6%.<sup>3</sup> Poverty means an income less than the official poverty standard, \$14,570 for a family of two in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Extreme poverty means an income less than half the poverty standard.

Poverty rates are much higher for single mother families than for other households. The 42.2% poverty rate for people in single mother families was almost three times the 15.1% rate for the population as a whole, and was more than four times the 10.1% rate for people in married couple families. The 42.2% single mother rate was also much higher than the 25.6% poverty rate for people in single father families.

Over half of family poverty is single mother poverty. In 2010, there were 14.2 million poor people in single mother families, 11.2 million in married couple families, and 2.3 million in single father families.

Poverty rates are higher for single mothers who are women of color. In 2010, the poverty rate was 50.3% for Hispanic single mothers, 47.1% for Black single mothers, and 32.7% for non-Hispanic White single mothers. Three fifths of poor single mothers were Black or Hispanic.

Over half (52%) of poor single mothers were employed in 2010 and 14% were employed full-time all year. A majority of those who were jobless the entire year had at least one child below age 6.

Two thirds (66.8%) of poor single mother families received Food Stamps in 2010 but only one quarter (27.1%) received cash welfare assistance.

Material hardship is quite common for single mother families. In 2009, the most recent year for which these data are available, 37% of single mother families were counted as "food insecure" under national federal standards, meaning that their "access to adequate food [was] limited by lack of money."<sup>5</sup> In 2010, single mother families accounted for over 75% of the 171,000 families officially counted as homeless.<sup>6</sup>

Single mother poverty rates are much higher in the U.S. than in other high income countries. In the mid-2000s, the poverty rate for single mothers in the U.S. was the highest among 16 high income countries, and almost twice the average rate in the other 15 high income countries.<sup>7</sup>

A low minimum wage, scarce employment, occupational segregation into low-wage "women's work," unaffordable child care, child support delinquency, the absence of a family allowance program,

and a weak unemployment insurance system all contribute to the exceptionally high U.S. single mother poverty rate. Another important factor is our restrictive and stingy welfare program.<sup>8</sup> Since the 1996 enactment of federal “welfare reform” legislation, welfare program enrollment has plummeted among poor families.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, welfare benefit amounts are far below the average in other high income countries, and in virtually every state have fallen to less than 50% of the poverty standard.<sup>10</sup>

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This report supported in part by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex 2010,” available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See, Slade, Alexander & Andrea Beller, *The Importance Of Duration Of Family Structure In The Production of Health by Gender* (2011), available at <http://paa2011.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=111092>; Antecol, Heather & Kelly Bernard, *Does Single Parenthood Increase The Probability Of Teenage Promiscuity, Substance Use, And Crime?*, 20 *Journal of Population Economics* 55-71 (2007); Graefe, D.R. and D.T. Lichter, *Life Course Transitions of American Children: Parental Cohabitation, Marriage, and Single Motherhood*, 36 *Demography* 205–17 (1999); Moffitt, R.A. and M.S. Rendall, *Cohort Trends in the Lifetime Distribution of Female Family Headship in the United States, 1968–1985*, 32 *Demography* 32:407–24 (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Except as otherwise indicated, the poverty figures cited in this report are taken from the detailed Census Bureau poverty data for 2010 available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/pov/toc.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Higher amounts apply to larger family sizes.

<sup>5</sup> The rate cited in the text is the food insecurity rate for households with children under 18 years with a female head with no spouse present as reported by USDA in the annual publication “Household Food Security in the United States 2009,” available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR108/ERR108.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* (2010), available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2010HomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Legal Momentum, *Poverty Rates for Single Mothers Are Higher in the U.S. than in Other High-Income Countries* (2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-poverty-higher-us.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> See Legal Momentum, *Welfare Reform at Age 15: A Vanishing Safety Net for Women and Children* (2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/welfare-reform-15.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Legal Momentum, *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down* (2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Legal Momentum, *Welfare Benefits and Child Poverty: A Cross-Country Comparison* (2009), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/welfare-benefits-and-child.pdf>.

**POVERTY RATES FOR SINGLE MOTHERS ARE HIGHER IN THE U.S THAN IN  
OTHER HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES**

Legal Momentum's recent report *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down*<sup>1</sup> detailed high and rising poverty rates for single mothers in the United States between 2000 and 2010. Comparing the U.S. rates to poverty rates for single mothers in other high income countries shows that poverty rates for single mothers are exceptionally high in the U.S.

DENMARK	8%
SWEDEN	10%
FINLAND	11%
NORWAY	14%
AUSTRIA	18%
SWITZERLAND	18%
HOLLAND	22%
LUXEMBOURG	29%
SPAIN	30%
ITALY	30%
UNITED KINGDOM	32%
AUSTRALIA	35%
IRELAND	39%
GERMANY	42%
CANADA	48%
15 COUNTRY AVERAGE	26%
UNITED STATES	49%
Ratio of U.S. rate to average rate in other 15 countries	1.88

Table One lists the poverty rates for children in single mother families reported by the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)<sup>2</sup> for the U.S. and for 15 other high income countries. The rates are for 2004 except for Australia (2003) and Sweden (2005). The 49% U.S. rate was the highest rate and almost twice the 26% average rate in the other 15 high income countries.

The LIS poverty rates are based on a poverty standard that defines poverty as an income less than 50% of median income adjusted for household size. Using the official U.S. poverty standard, the poverty rate was 42% in 2004 for children in single mother families.<sup>3</sup>

The European Union reports the percentage of single parent families in European countries with a household income less than 60% of median income adjusted for household size. Such families are living “in or near poverty.” Table Two lists the in-or-near poverty rates for single parent families in 2007 reported by the European Union for 16 high income European nations,<sup>4</sup> and calculated by Legal Momentum for the U.S.<sup>5</sup> The 50% in-or-near-poverty rate in the U.S. was the highest among these 17 high income countries, and more than one and one half times the 31% average in the other 16 high income countries.

DENMARK	17%
FINLAND	22%
ICELAND	23%
SWEDEN	24%
FRANCE	27%
NORWAY	29%
HOLLAND	30%
AUSTRIA	31%
ITALY	31%
CYPRUS	33%
SPAIN	34%
GERMANY	34%
BELGIUM	36%
IRELAND	40%
UNITED KINGDOM	44%
LUXEMBOURG	45%
16 COUNTRY AVERAGE	31%
UNITED STATES	50%
Ratio of U.S. rate to average rate in other 16 countries	1.61

(June 2011. Contact Timothy Casey, [tcasey@legalmomentum.org](mailto:tcasey@legalmomentum.org), for further information.)

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## ENDNOTES

This report is supported in part by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

<sup>1</sup> *Single Mothers ...* is available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The LIS is a cross-national data archive and research institute located in Luxembourg with a database that includes income micro data derived from household surveys from a large number of countries at multiple points in time. The LIS Key Figures, available for download at <http://www.lisproject.org/key-figures/key-figures.htm>, are calculated by LIS staff and provide country-level poverty and inequality



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indicators. Legal Momentum downloaded the rates on May 17, 2011 and rounded each rate to the nearer full percentage point.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Table “POV03: People in Families with Related Children Under 18 by Family Structure, Age, and Sex, Iterated by Income-to-Poverty Ratio and Race: 2004 Below 100% of Poverty All Races,” available at [http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new03\\_100\\_01.htm](http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new03_100_01.htm).

<sup>4</sup> European Union, *Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion A Statistical Portrait of the European Union 2010* at Table 3-2 (2010), available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-EP-09-001/EN/KS-EP-09-001-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-EP-09-001/EN/KS-EP-09-001-EN.PDF). The European Union refers to these rates as the “at-risk-of-poverty” rates. In the European Union, about seven out of every eight single parents are single mothers. See Eurostat News Release, *Women and Men in the EU Seen Through Figures* (March 4, 2011), available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/1-04032011-AP/EN/1-04032011-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/1-04032011-AP/EN/1-04032011-AP-EN.PDF).

<sup>5</sup> Legal Momentum calculated the in-or-near-poverty rate for persons in the U.S. in primary single parent families with children below age 18 using the U.S. Census Bureau CPS Table Creator II, available at [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/apm/cpssc\\_altpov.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/apm/cpssc_altpov.html). In the U.S., about four out of every five single parents are single mothers.

## Single Mother Poverty Rates Remain Exceptionally High Even When Food Stamps and Earned Income Credits are Counted

The official poverty rate for single mother families has been exceptionally high every year since official poverty measurement began in the 1960's.<sup>1</sup> Families are counted as poor if their annual family income is less than the annual poverty threshold amount. The current poverty guideline for a family of three is \$18,350.

The official income definition used in poverty calculation has been criticized for excluding Food Stamps and federal Earned Income Credits (EIC). On the other hand, the official definition has also been criticized for including income spent on work expenses and taxes which is therefore unavailable for a family's basic needs.

Table 1 shows single mother poverty rates under four alternative income definitions: the official definition; the official definition minus expenditures on work expenses (including child care) and on income, payroll, or property taxes; the official definition plus Food Stamps and the EIC; and the official definition minus expenditures on work expenses and taxes but plus Food Stamps and the EIC.<sup>2</sup> The rates are for the three most recent years for which data are now available.

	Official Income	Official Income - Work Expenses & Taxes	Official Income + Food Stamps & EIC	Official Income + Food Stamps & EIC - Work Expenses & Taxes
2007	38%	45%	30%	36%
2008	39%	46%	31%	37%
2009	40%	45%	29%	34%

Excluding work and tax expenses increases measured poverty, while counting Food Stamps and the EIC reduces measured poverty. However, the single mother poverty rate is exceptionally high under each definition.

(June 2011. Contact Timothy Casey, [tcasey@legalmomentum.org](mailto:tcasey@legalmomentum.org), for further information.)

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<sup>1</sup> See Legal Momentum, *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down* (January 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Table 1 poverty rates are the rates for persons in female-headed primary families, no spouse present, with related children under age 18, as calculated by Legal Momentum using the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Table Creator II, available at [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/apm/cpssc\\_altprov.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/apm/cpssc_altprov.html).

## Harmful House Food Stamp Proposal Poses An Especially Grave Threat to Single Mothers and Their Children

The budget plan for FY 2012 that the House passed in April by a party line vote includes a Food Stamp proposal that the House Budget Committee says is intended to “encourage states to reduce [the Food Stamp] rolls” by applying to Food Stamps the welfare reform principles that Congress enacted in 1996 for welfare cash assistance.<sup>1</sup> As welfare reform did to cash assistance, the House proposal would convert Food Stamps to a block grant, cap federal Food Stamp funding, and weaken or repeal the program’s national standards. House Budget Committee staff have estimated that the proposal would reduce federal Food Stamp spending by \$127 billion, about 20%, over a ten year period.<sup>2</sup>

The Food Stamp program currently aids over 44 million persons in over 20 million low income households.<sup>3</sup> About half of the households aided by Food Stamps are family households with children, and a majority of these family households are families headed by single mothers.<sup>4</sup>

If “welfare reform” in Food Stamps had the same impact as welfare reform in cash assistance, the House proposal, if enacted, could ultimately shrink the number of needy persons aided by Food Stamps by two-thirds or more, shrink real benefits for those still aided by 20% or

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This report supported in part by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

<sup>1</sup> House Budget Committee, *The Path to Prosperity: Restoring America’s Promise*, at p. 41 (April 2011), available at <http://budget.house.gov/UploadedFiles/PathToProsperityFY2012.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Ryan Budget Would Slash SNAP Funding by \$127 Billion Over Ten Years* at p. 1 and n.1 (April 2011), available at <http://www.cbpp.org/files/4-11-11fa.pdf>. The “SNAP” in the title of this report is the acronym for the “Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program,” now the official name for Food Stamps.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), *Program Data* (as of Feb. 2011), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/snapmain.htm>. Detailed information about the Food Stamp program is available from the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), <http://frac.org/>, and from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <http://www.cbpp.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> USDA, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2009* at Table 3.3 on p. 19 (2010), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/2009Characteristics.pdf>.

more, and shrink the current 86% participation rate<sup>5</sup> for eligible family households to 40% or less.

Welfare reform in cash assistance reduced the number of families aided from 80% of poor families in 1995 in the pre-reform Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, to 27% of poor families in 2009 in the post-reform Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that replaced AFDC.<sup>6</sup> Welfare reform also reduced the participation rate for eligible families from 84% in AFDC in 1995 to 40% in TANF in 2005, the most recent year for which the federal TANF agency has reported this rate.<sup>7</sup> Under TANF, benefits have declined in real value in all but three states and by 20% or more in over 30 states.<sup>8</sup> Benefits are now below the poverty level in every state and less than five dollars a person a day in most states. Though TANF benefits are, in theory, supposed to suffice for all basic needs except health care, in a substantial majority of states the TANF benefit for a family with no income is now less than the Food Stamp benefit for a family with no income.

Due to the contraction of cash assistance, the Food Stamp program now aids several times as many needy families as TANF does. In an average month in FY 2009, Food Stamps aided 7.5 million families with children while TANF aided only 1.8 million.

The House proposal poses an especially grave threat to single mother families for whom the contraction of cash assistance has made Food Stamps increasingly indispensable. In 2009,

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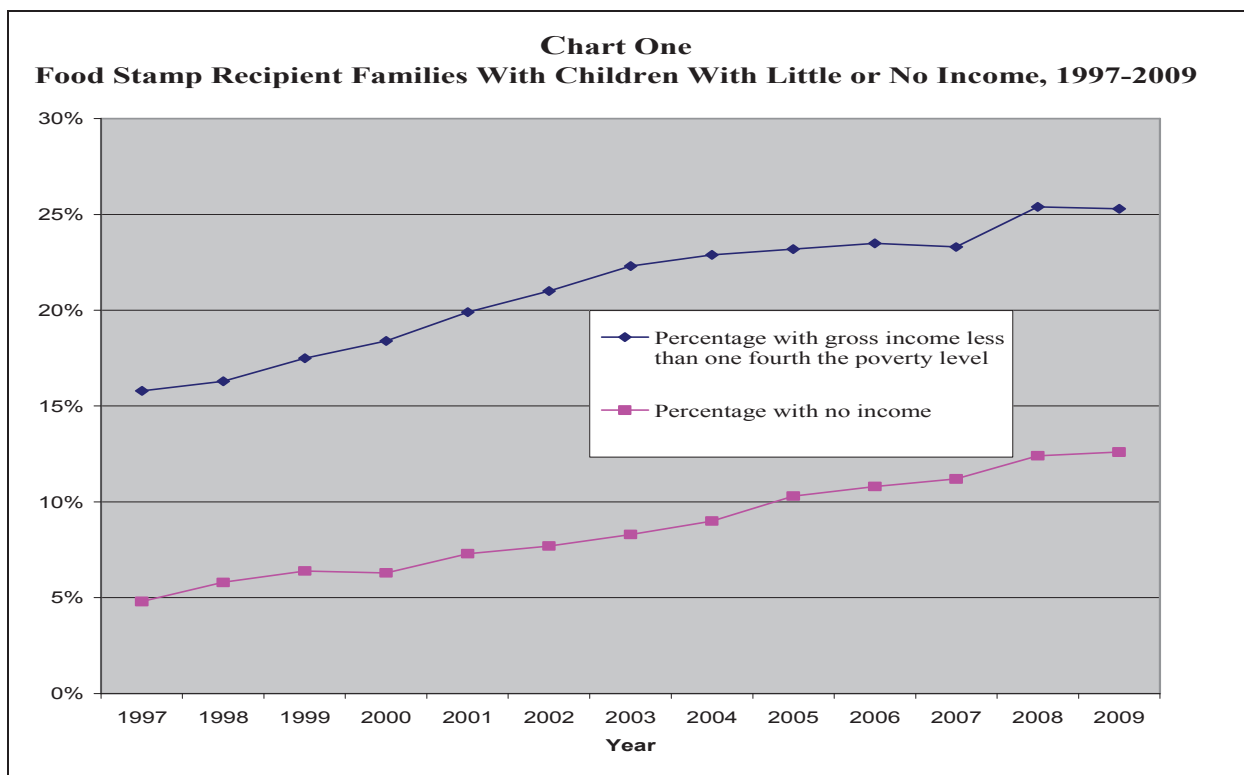
<sup>5</sup> USDA, *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2001-2008* at Table A.2 on p. 22 (2010), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Trends2001-2008.pdf>. The 86% figure is the rate for 2008, the most recent available.

<sup>6</sup> See Legal Momentum, *Welfare Reform at Age 15: A Vanishing Safety Net for Women and Children* (April 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/welfare-reform-15.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Id.

<sup>8</sup> Center on Budget Policy and Priorities, *TANF Benefits Are Low And Have Not Kept Pace With Inflation* (2010), available at <http://www.cbpp.org/files/10-14-10tanf.pdf>; see also, Legal Momentum, *Meager And Diminishing Welfare Benefits Perpetuate Widespread Material Hardship For Poor Women And Children* (2009), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/tanf-meager-benefits.pdf>.

though single mothers had a poverty rate of 38.5%, only 11% reported receiving TANF compared to the 38% who reported receiving Food Stamps.<sup>9</sup>



A contraction in Food Stamps like that in cash assistance would leave hundreds of thousands of families with little or nothing for their basic needs. Due to the continuous contraction of cash assistance, the percentage of Food Stamp recipient families with children with no or little cash income has jumped. As shown in the chart, the percentage with no cash income rose from 5% in 1997 to 13% (942,000 families) in 2009, and the percentage with a gross cash income less than one fourth the poverty level rose from 16% in 1997 to 25% (1.9 million families) in 2009.<sup>10</sup>

(May 2011. Contact Timothy Casey, [tcasey@legalmomentum.org](mailto:tcasey@legalmomentum.org), for further information.)

<sup>9</sup> Legal Momentum, *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down* (January 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> The chart is based on the figures reported in the annual publication titled “*Characteristics of [Food Stamp/ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] Households: Fiscal Year \_\_\_\_*”, the most recent of which is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/2009Characteristics.pdf>.

## **SINGLE MOTHERS SINCE 2000: FALLING FARTHER DOWN<sup>1</sup>**

For the one in four U.S. families who are single mother families, the ‘Great Recession’ of 2008-2009 exacerbated a period of losing ground that had started around 2000. From 2000 to 2009, joblessness increased for single mothers at the same time that “welfare reform” was making welfare less accessible to single mother families in need. In 2009, over a quarter of single mothers were jobless the entire year, a third were jobless in an average month, and less than half were employed full-time year-round.

Increased joblessness and decreased access to welfare combined to increase poverty and hardship. Between 2000 and 2009, the percentage of single mothers with an income less than the poverty level rose from 33% to 38.5%, the percentage with an income less than half the poverty level rose from 14% to 19%, the percentage counted as “food insecure” rose from 31% to 37%, and the percentage turning to food pantries to feed their families rose from 8.6% to 13.7%. One fifth of single mother families now live doubled up in someone else’s home. Family homelessness has increased and the vast majority of homeless families are single mother families.

### **EMPLOYMENT RATES HAVE FALLEN**

The percentage of single mothers employed in an average month fell from 76% in 2000 to 73% in 2007, and to 68% in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

The percentage of single mothers employed full-time year-round fell from 51% in 2002 to 49% in 2007, and to 45% in 2009.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This report supported in part by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

<sup>2</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for mothers in families maintained by women with own children under 18 in the annual publication “Employment Characteristics of Families – (year),” most recent edition available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates for household heads in female-headed primary families with no spouse present and with related children under 18 as calculated by Legal Momentum using the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey Table Creator (CPS Table Creator) available at

The percentage of single mothers never employed at any time in the year rose from 21% in 2002 to 23% in 2007, and to 27% in 2009.<sup>4</sup>

### **UNEMPLOYMENT RATES HAVE CLIMBED**

The official statistics count non-employed persons as “unemployed” only if they are actively searching for employment. Most jobless single mothers are not counted as unemployed because they are not actively seeking employment due to lack of child care, ill health, or other reasons.

The official unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number unemployed by the sum of the number employed and the number unemployed. For single mothers, the average monthly unemployment rate rose from 7.5% in 2000 to 8.0% in 2007, and to 13.6% in 2009.<sup>5</sup>

### **MEDIAN INCOME HAS DECLINED**

Median annual income (in 2009 dollars) for single mother families fell from \$27,296 in 2000 to \$25,809 in 2007, and to \$25,172 in 2009.<sup>6</sup>

### **POVERTY RATES HAVE INCREASED**

The official poverty rate for single mother families rose from 33% in 2000 to 37% in 2007, and to 38.5% in 2009.<sup>7</sup>

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[http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/cps\\_table\\_creator.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/cps_table_creator.html). 2002 is the earliest year covered by the CPS Table Creator.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates reported by BLS for women in families with own children under 18 and with no spouse present in the annual publication “Employment Characteristics of Families – (year),” most recent edition available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> The amounts cited in the text are the amounts reported by the Census Bureau for families with a female householder with related children under 18 and no spouse present in “Table F-10. Presence of Children Under 18 Years Old by Median and Mean Income: 1974 to 2009,” available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/families/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates reported by the Census Bureau for families with a female householder with related children under 18 and no spouse present in “Table 4. Poverty Status of Families, by Type of Family, Presence of Related Children, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2009,” available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/families.html>.

Families with an income less than half the poverty level are commonly considered to be in “extreme poverty.” The percentage of single mother families in extreme poverty rose from 14% in 2000 to 18% in 2007, and to 19% in 2009.<sup>8</sup>

### **WELFARE RECEIPT HAS FALLEN DESPITE INCREASED JOBLESSNESS AND POVERTY**

The 1996 federal “welfare reform” law ended “welfare as we know it” by replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children or “AFDC” with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or “TANF” as the national welfare program for families with children. TANF created strong financial incentives for states to reduce their welfare caseloads and benefit amounts. As a result, welfare receipt declined from 62% of the number of poor children in 1995 to 21% in 2009, and TANF benefits plummeted far below the official poverty level.<sup>9</sup> For a family of three, the daily benefit per person is now less than \$8.00 in all but two states, less than \$5.00 in thirty states, and as low as \$1.86 in one state.

Because of their high jobless rates, the contraction of welfare aid has had an especially harsh impact on single mother families, and is probably the most important cause of the increase in extreme poverty that single mothers experienced in the 2000’s. Despite rising joblessness and poverty, the percentage of single mother families receiving welfare benefits fell from 16% in 2001 to 11% in 2007, and to 10% in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates for families with a female householder with related children under 18 and no spouse present calculated by Legal Momentum from the data reported by the Census Bureau in “Pov 27: Source of Income by Ratio of Poverty Threshold for Families and Unrelated Individuals: (year)” for 2009 and 2007, and in “Table 18. Source of Income by Ratio of Poverty Threshold for Families and Unrelated Individuals in 2000” for 2000.

<sup>9</sup> See Legal Momentum, *The Bitter Fruit Of Welfare Reform: A Sharp Drop In The Percentage Of Eligible Women And Children Receiving Welfare* (2009), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/lm-tanf-bitter-fruit.pdf>; and Legal Momentum, *Meager And Diminishing Welfare Benefits Perpetuate Widespread Material Hardship For Poor Women And Children* (2009), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/tanf-meager-benefits.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates of receipt for children living with their mother only calculated by Legal Momentum from the data reported by the Census Bureau in the annual report “Table C8. Poverty Status, Food Stamp Receipt, and Public Assistance for Children Under 18 Years by Selected Characteristics (year),” most recent edition available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.



## **FOOD STAMP RECEIPT HAS INCREASED**

Food Stamp receipt, like welfare receipt, plunged in the second half of the 1990's as a result of "welfare reform." Unlike with welfare, however, in the early 2000's the federal government responded to this plunge by adopting new Food Stamp policies aimed at increasing participation among eligible families. The subsequent Food Stamp participation expansion was particularly beneficial to single mother families for the same reason that the welfare contraction was particularly harmful. The percentage of single mother families receiving Food Stamp benefits increased from 29% in 2001 to 33% in 2007 and to 41% in 2010.<sup>11</sup>

## **HOMELESSNESS AND DOUBLE-UPS HAVE INCREASED**

For the past three years the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has counted the number of homeless persons in emergency shelters at any time in the year and the number of persons homeless (both sheltered and unsheltered) on one given day. The number of families using emergency shelters rose from 130,968 in 2007 to 159,142 in 2008, and to 170,129 in 2009, with single mother families accounting each year for between 75% and 80% of the total number of homeless families.<sup>12</sup> Single mother families probably also accounted for most of the 17,675 homeless families without shelter on a given day in 2009.

Economic necessity forces many low income families to double up in another person's or family's household. Doubling up is often a precursor to homelessness. The percentage of single mother families doubled up in another person's household declined from 18.4% in 2001 to 18.2% in 2007, but rose to 20.3% in 2010.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* (2010), at p. 43 & 51, available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/5thHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates for children living with their mother but not their father in a household in which the mother is not the householder calculated by Legal Momentum from the data reported by the Census Bureau in the annual report "Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex (year)," most recent edition available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

## **FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD PANTRY USE HAVE INCREASED**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issues annual studies on household food security and food insecurity, with “food insecurity” described by USDA as meaning that “access to adequate food is limited by lack of money and other resources.” The food insecurity rate for single mother families declined from 31% in 2000 to 30% in 2007, but then jumped to 37% in 2009.<sup>14</sup>

These same USDA studies also report on the numbers of persons who turn to food pantries for emergency food assistance. The percentage of single mothers using a food pantry rose from 8.6% in 2000 to 10.6% in 2007, and to 13.7% in 2009.<sup>15</sup>

## **BLACK AND HISPANIC SINGLE MOTHERS TRAIL WHITE SINGLE MOTHERS**

About half of single mothers are either Hispanic (21%) or Black Non-Hispanic (31%).<sup>16</sup> White single mothers have higher employment rates, higher incomes, higher levels of college attendance, and lower poverty rates than Black or Hispanic mothers. Black and Hispanic single mothers have similar poverty rates, employment rates and median incomes, but Black single mothers have higher rates of college attendance than Hispanic single mothers.

<b>Table One<sup>17</sup></b>			
<b>White, Black, and Hispanic Single Mothers in 2009</b>			
	White	Black	Hispanic
Poverty Rate	32%	44%	46%
Employment Rate	69%	62%	63%
Median Family Income	\$29,311	\$22,167	\$22,033
Any College Attendance	59%	49%	33%

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<sup>14</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates for households with children under 18 years with a female head with no spouse present as reported by USDA in the annual publication “Household Food Security in the United States (year),” most recent edition available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR108/ERR108.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Id.

<sup>16</sup> The figures cited in the text are the figures for 2010 for female-headed primary families with related children under 18 and no spouse present as calculated by Legal Momentum using the CPS Table Creator.

<sup>17</sup> Table One sources: employment rates, poverty rates, and college attendance rates are the rates for household heads in female-headed primary families with related children under 18 and no spouse present as calculated by Legal Momentum using the CPS Table Creator; median income figures are from the source cited in footnote 6.

## SINGLE MOTHERS TRAIL SINGLE FATHERS

In 2010, 23.1% of children were living with their mother only and 3.4% with their father only.<sup>18</sup> Of the total 26.5% of children living with one parent only, about six sevenths were living with their mother and about one seventh with their father.

<b>Table Two</b> <sup>19</sup>		
<b>Single Mothers and Single Fathers in 2009</b>		
	Single Mothers	Single Fathers
Poverty Rate	39%	24%
Employment Rate	68%	77%
Median Weekly Earnings Full-time Employment	\$546	\$702
Median Family Income	\$25,172	\$36,085
Any College Attendance	51%	44%

Single mothers are more likely than single fathers to have attended college. However, single mothers have higher poverty rates, lower incomes, lower employment rates, and lower wage rates. The 39% poverty rate for single mother families in 2009 was almost twice the 24% rate for single father families. In 2009, median weekly earnings for single mothers working full-time (\$546) were only 78% of the median for single fathers (\$702) working full-time, and median annual income for single mother families (\$25,172) was only 70% of the median annual income for single father families (\$36,085).

## SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES TRAIL FAR BEHIND TWO PARENT FAMILIES

There is a wide gulf in economic well-being between single mother and two parent families. In 2009, two parents families had a median income (\$76,649) triple that of single

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<sup>18</sup> The rates cited in the text are the rates calculated by Legal Momentum from the data reported by the Census Bureau in the report “C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex: 2010,” available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Table Two sources: poverty rates are from the source cited in footnote 7; employment rates are from the source cited in footnote 5; college attendance rates are the rates for household heads with related children under 18 as calculated by Legal Momentum using the CPS Table Creator; median income figures are from the source cited in footnote 6; median earnings figures are from Table 8 at page 41 in the U.S. Department of Labor report “Highlights of Women’s Earnings in 2009,” available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2009.pdf>.

mother families (\$25,172), and a poverty rate (8%) one fifth that of single mother families (39%).

	Single Mothers	Married Mothers	Married Fathers
Poverty Rate	39%	8%	8%
Employment Rate	68%	66%	88%
Employed Full-time Full-year	45%	42%	75%
Median Weekly Earnings Full-time Employment	\$546	\$705	\$939
Median Family Income	\$25,172	\$76,649	\$76,649
Any College Attendance	50%	65%	61%
Bachelors Degree or more	16%	37%	35%

Employment rates for single mothers are about the same as for married mothers but far below those for married fathers. In an average month in 2009, there was no employed parent in 32% of single mother families but in only 4%<sup>21</sup> of two parent families (not shown in table). The percentage of two parent families with both parents employed (59%)<sup>22</sup> (not shown in table) was almost as large at the percentage (68%) of single mother families with an employed mother.

Wage rates for single mothers are far below those for married mothers and even farther below those for married fathers. In 2009, median weekly earnings for single mothers working full-time (\$546) were only 77% of the median for married mothers (\$705) working full-time, and only 58% of the median for married fathers (\$939) working full-time.

### **SINGLE MOTHERS NEED CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES AND EQUAL WAGES**

Single mothers need steady full-time employment to achieve even a modest level of economic well-being. Joblessness imperils their economic security and thrusts many into deep poverty.

<sup>20</sup> Table Three sources: employed full-time full-year rates calculated by Legal Momentum using the CPS Table Creator; for other variables, same sources as for Table Two.

<sup>21</sup> The source for the 4% figure cited in the text is Table 4 in “Employment Characteristics of Families – 2009,” available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> The source for the 59% figure cited in the text is the same source cited in footnote 21.

Single mothers need more than a low official unemployment rate to achieve high employment rates. In 2000, the monthly employment rate for single mothers was only 76% even though the monthly unemployment rate (for all persons) was just 4%, the lowest rate in at least the last forty years.

Single mothers must also have affordable child care to achieve high employment rates. The lack of affordable child care probably accounts for much if not most of the large gap in employment rates between single mothers and married fathers.

For many single mothers, potential earnings are too low to pay for child care. A recent study found that in 2009 the average cost for infant center care ranged from 26% to 67% of the state median income for single mother families.<sup>23</sup> The average child care cost for two children in care, one an infant and one four years old, ranged from 48% to 114% of the state median income for single mother families.<sup>24</sup>

For many single mothers employment is therefore impossible unless child care cost is subsidized. A substantial number of single mothers do participate in child care subsidy programs and research has confirmed that these programs do raise employment rates for single mothers.<sup>25</sup> However, public subsidy funding is sufficient to reach only a small fraction of those eligible.<sup>26</sup>

Raising wages for single mothers to the same level as for single fathers could also increase single mothers' employment rates. Research has shown that higher wages increase single mothers' employment rates probably at least in part by making child care more affordable.<sup>27</sup> Single fathers' higher wage rates contributes to their higher employment rates relative to single mothers.

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<sup>23</sup> National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agencies, *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care 2010 Update*, available at [http://www.naccrra.org/docs/Cost\\_Report\\_073010-final.pdf](http://www.naccrra.org/docs/Cost_Report_073010-final.pdf).

<sup>24</sup>Id.

<sup>25</sup>See, e.g., Chris Herbst, *The Labor Supply Effects of Child Care Costs and Wages in the Presence of Subsidies and the Earned Income Tax Credit*, 8 Rev. Econ. Household 199 – 230 (2010), available at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/m614275597461577/fulltext.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> See Testimony of Helen Blank for the Subcommittee on Children and Families of the Senate Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee Hearing On “The State of the American Child: Securing Our Children’s Future” (Nov. 18, 2010), available at <http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Blank1.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Herbst, footnote 25 supra.

## **SINGLE MOTHERS NEED A HUMANE SAFETY NET**

The lack of jobs and the lack of affordable child care force many single mothers to turn to the national safety net system to meet their families' basic needs. While the Food Stamp program does reach a good fraction of single mother families, Food Stamps at most suffice for food and can not be used for rent, utilities, clothing or other important needs.

Jobless single mothers necessarily must turn to TANF for their other needs. However, as already explained, TANF now aids only a small fraction of poor single mothers and TANF benefits are disgracefully inadequate.

## **CHALLENGES AHEAD**

New policies to improve the economic well-being of single mothers and their families are imperative but efforts to achieve them face many challenges. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office projects that unemployment rates will remain above pre-recession levels at least through 2014.<sup>28</sup> Progress in reducing the gender wage gap has halted in recent years.<sup>29</sup> To obtain new federal funds for child care and TANF, it will be necessary to address the deficit concerns expressed by both parties and the pledges by the new Republican House leadership to reduce federal domestic spending. Due to reduced revenue and other factors, many states are now considering and some have recently enacted new TANF cuts. While these are daunting challenges, nevertheless the growing awareness of single mothers' economic distress provides an opportunity to mobilize support for the new policies that are needed.

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<sup>28</sup> Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: An Update* (August 2010), available at <http://www.cbo.gov/doc.cfm?index=11705>.

<sup>29</sup> See Institute for Women's Policy Research, *The Gender Wage Gap: 2009* (updated September 2010), available at <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/C350.pdf>.