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Poverty and Progress: The State of Being Poor in Missouri and New Threats Ahead

(JEFFERSON CITY, Missouri).....Sustained economic gains and strong federal and state programs have led to welcome progress in the fight against poverty over the last several years. Missouri is finally seeing poverty rates edge downwards. This is good news. But poverty in Missouri remains higher than it was before the Great Recession, and actions by Congress and the Trump administration threaten to weaken the very programs that have contributed to the progress made so far.

That's among the findings of [**Poverty and Progress: The State of Being Poor in Missouri and New Threats Ahead**](#), a new report released today by Empower Missouri and the Coalition on Human Needs (CHN).

Missouri's poverty rate was 14.0 percent in 2016, down from 14.8 percent in 2015 and from 15.5 percent in 2014, according to U.S. Census data released in September. Nationally, the poverty rate declined to 14.0 percent in 2016, down from 14.7 percent in 2015 and from a high of 15.9 percent in 2012.

"Missouri is making progress in the fight against poverty, but we can and must do better," said Jeanette Mott Oxford, Executive Director of Empower Missouri. "With job growth continuing and with strong federal and state programs for Missourians with low incomes, we are in an excellent position to reduce poverty more substantially. There are 827,000 Missourians still living in poverty who are counting on us to succeed. Now is the time to invest in programs with proven results and build on the positive momentum – rather than reduce funding."

CHN Executive Director Deborah Weinstein said many Missourians have been lifted out of poverty by programs such as housing assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), low-income tax credits and assistance for people with disabilities. "But now these very programs are on the chopping block," she said. "The Fiscal Year 2018 budget resolution passed by Congress and backed by the White House would cut billions of dollars from these very programs. Such cuts would increase suffering for millions of Americans and hundreds of thousands of Missourians in poverty and near poverty."

Among the report's findings:

- The poverty rate for African Americans in Missouri improved, decreasing from 28.0 percent in 2015 to 24.8 percent in 2016 and returning to pre-recession levels. 24.1 percent of Latinos lived in poverty in 2016, not statistically different from 2015 or 2007. Communities of color still remain disproportionately affected by poverty; the poverty rate among non-Hispanic whites in Missouri in 2016 was 11.5 percent. It is important to note that African Americans, Latinos and non-Hispanic whites are all poorer in Missouri than in the U.S. overall.
- Missouri has made progress in lowering the child poverty rate, which stood at 19.2 percent in 2016. This is basically unchanged from 2015, but it is down from the 2014 rate of 21.1 percent and from 22.6 percent in 2012. Tragically, children remain more likely to be poor in the U.S. than any other age group. As with adults, children of color experience poverty at much higher rates than their white peers. In 2016, 14.4 percent of non-Hispanic white children in Missouri lived in poverty, compared with 36.7 percent of African American children and 31.1 percent of Latino children.
- Missouri also has made progress in the number of people with health insurance, thanks to the Affordable Care Act. In Missouri, 8.9 percent of the population was uninsured in 2016, down from 13.0 percent in 2013, and could have made even more progress if the General Assembly had chosen to expand Medicaid eligibility guidelines that leave 300,000 Missourians in a coverage gap. Nationally, the uninsured rate in 2016 was 8.6 percent, down from 9.4 percent in 2015.

Poverty and Progress: The State of Being Poor in Missouri and New Threats Ahead notes that over the years, anti-poverty programs have lifted 1.1 million Missourians, including 250,000 children, out of official poverty on average each year between 2009 and 2012. Examples: 92,000 were lifted out of poverty by Supplemental Security Income (SSI), 220,000 fewer were poor because of SNAP, and 76,000 escaped poverty because of housing subsidies.

But these are the very programs threatened in Congress and by the Trump administration.

Overall, the report notes, the budget resolution approved recently by Congress would cut Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and other health care programs by \$1.3 trillion over a ten-year period. Medicare would be cut by \$473 billion. Programs in the “income security” category (which includes SNAP, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, unemployment insurance and low-income tax credits) would drop by \$653 billion.

The budget resolution calls for \$800 billion in cuts to domestic appropriations, threatening further cuts to housing, education, and substance abuse treatment. By 2027, the budget would slash these programs to 29 percent below their levels in FY 2010, taking inflation into account. If these cuts are made proportionately, by 2027, 900,000 low-income households would lose their rent subsidies, despite their success in lifting millions of families out of poverty.

“This budget shows the vision of the House and Senate leadership – to drastically reduce critical programs for low-income families in order to pay for tax cuts for the rich and corporations,” Weinstein said. “If our elected leaders really want to boost our economy and create jobs and a highly-skilled labor force, they would invest in programs that lift millions of children out of poverty, not cut them. They would invest in programs that allow parents to find and keep good paying jobs, like training programs, scheduling and paid leave protections, and child care. And they would require the wealthy and big corporations to pay their fair share, so we can increase these investments.”

Poverty and Progress: The State of Being Poor in Missouri and New Threats Ahead is available [here](#).