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Record-Breaking Poverty in San Bernardino County: The Cost to Society is Quickly Rising

San Bernardino, CA, October 14, 2011 - Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino (CAPSBC) is issuing a statement regarding the recent release of various reports for 2010 from the US Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Department of Agriculture, the Center for American Progress and others. The reports highlight Poverty in the United States, breaking down detail all the way to congressional district levels.

According to the Current Population Survey for 2010 and the 2010 American Community Survey reports released by the US Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the official national poverty rate in 2010 was a record breaking 46.2 million people. This is the most ever since counts began back in 1960. This equates to 1 in 6 Americans are living in poverty (defined as income at or below \$22,350 for a family of four). The hardest hit by the economic downturn have been children, people of color and women head of households (single moms). Sadly, 22% of American children live in poverty and 10% live in extreme poverty (below \$8,700 for a family of three).

Here in the Inland Empire, the numbers skew higher than the national averages. In our 43rd congressional district which covers the cities of San Bernardino, Colton, Rialto, Grand Terrace, Fontana, and Ontario, 24% live in poverty and an unbelievable 32% of persons under 18 years of age living in poverty. These same cities see unemployment continuing to plague the community with 40% of residents 16 years of age and older not working at all in 2010.

"The poverty numbers tell of the challenges and difficulties that families are facing. The Great Recession of 2009 has not ended for over 360,000 poor San Bernardino County residents who struggle to hold on. Poverty this deep and persistent threatens our children's opportunities for a healthy and productive life. Every day that we do nothing to get people back to work pushes more people out of the middle class and into poverty," stated Patricia Nickols, CEO for CAPSBC.

The calls for assistance at CAPSBC have risen dramatically and the agency is seeing more and more the new face of poverty: middle class American families. For example, recently a San Bernardino couple named

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Ismael and Maria came to CAPSBC at a community outreach event and told us that they had both lost their jobs, then their home and, as a result, their family became homeless and were living in their mini-van which was about to be repossessed. Maria was pregnant at the time and the couple had two other children, a three year girl and a teenage son. The father described their lives as living like “fugitives” trying to avoid repossession and figure out how to survive. They often went hungry and with nowhere to turn, CAPSBC was able to help stabilize the family by providing transitional housing, food and clothing through the Family Development Program. The couple was then able to concentrate on putting their lives back together. Today the couple are both gainfully employed and living in permanent housing. They expressed their sincere gratitude and promised “to never forget how they were given a hand up, not a hand out.” They promised to give back what CAPSBC had given them – their dignity and ability to contribute to the community. This is a true testament as to how high impact social services programs at CAPSBC are working to make a difference in the lives of San Bernardino County residents and for the community at large. It benefits us all to have stable families, working and contributing to society.

CAPSBC sees families like Ismael and Maria coming through their doors so often these days. CAPSBC phone lines are jammed with over 20,000 calls a month from low-income residents looking for assistance. The need now is greater than ever and at the same time Congress is looking to slash these programs by nearly 50%. It makes no sense to cut programs that are working to reduce poverty, this will only keep our economy from growing and creating jobs. People who are out of work need continuing Unemployment Insurance. Our low income county residents need programs like SNAP/food stamps and low income tax credits. Programs like Medicaid and CHIP have done so much to get medical care to children and yet congress is looking to slash these as well.

A significant, painful outcome of poverty is hunger and all of it can be traced to the lack of jobs/unemployment. Every American is now paying for a quickly rising Hunger Bill. A recent study published by The Center for American Progress and Professor Donald Shepard at Brandeis University entitled “Hunger in America: The Suffering We All Pay For,” outlines the cost of letting people go hungry in America. According to this study, the Great Recession caused a dramatic rise in the number of Americans who are suffering from hunger or food insecurity. Federal and state programs have done a great deal to keep starvation at bay, but the rising incidence of hunger exacts a very large cost to society. It is conservatively estimated that hunger in America in 2010 cost our country \$167.5 billion. California has the second highest hunger bill among all states at \$20 billion in 2010. This is an increase of 47% since 2007. Hungry individuals get sick more often which imposes costs on our health care system and lost productivity at work. Children who are food insecure are absent from school and drop out more often than their peers. They increase the cost of special education and decrease their earning potential over their lifetime. If all persons in the United States who were hungry or food insecure were given food stamps (SNAP), it would cost of total of \$83 billion which is half the cost we are incurring now.

The solution to these problems can happen with the political will to implement policies that increase employment and wages and modest increases in federal nutrition and social services programs. All efforts to address these issues should be carefully evaluated against the costs we are already incurring as outlined in the Hunger Bill. “Without programs for the low-income, the number of families living in poverty would increase beyond the astonishing numbers we see today. We as a nation cannot let this happen to our people and our children who will one day lead our country,” stated Nancy Ruth White, Board Chair for CAPSBC.

We encourage the public to take time to write or call their elected officials with their concerns. CAPSBC will be closely following the poverty issues on our blog at www.capsbc.blogspot.com and we invite public commentary.

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CAPSBC is a non-profit 501(c)3. As one of the largest non-profit human services agencies in San Bernardino County, CAPSBC has provided resources and opportunities to low-income individuals and families to become stable and self-reliant for over 40 years. CAPSBC programs include Energy, Education and Environmental Services, Family Development, Individual Development Accounts, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, Homeless Management Information Systems and the CAPSBC Food Bank. For more information about CAPSBC programs and services, call 909-723-1500 or visit us on the web at www.capsbc.org and www.facebook.com/cap.sanbernardino