



City has nation's 7th highest poverty rate

Waukesha County among lowest, Census Bureau says

By **BILL GLAUBER** and **BEN POSTON**
billglauber@journalsentinel.com

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Poverty in Wisconsin isn't just about the economy — it's also about geography.

Nearly one in four residents of Milwaukee lived in poverty in 2007 according to U.S. Census estimates released Tuesday. The city had the seventh highest poverty rate - 24.4% - among places with a population of more than 250,000.

Meanwhile, in Waukesha County, one in 25 residents lived in poverty. The county's 4% poverty rate was fifth lowest among counties with populations over 250,000.

The economic gap between poorer cities and wealthier suburbs is part of everyday life in America. Yet the new numbers from the Census Bureau, contained in the American Community Survey, show that the economic gaps remain huge in southeastern Wisconsin.

The poverty rates afflicting Milwaukee are long-standing.

"Of course it's an outrage, a continuation of two decades of economic decline in the community," said Marc Levine, professor of urban studies and

economic development at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

"We don't have a coherent anti-poverty strategy in place to alleviate the situation where you now have one-quarter of the city's population living below a stingy definition of the poverty line," he said. "A more realistic definition, what it really takes to live at something approaching a low-income level in this community, might raise a real poverty rate above 30 percent. There should be outrage. We should in fact be mobilizing as a community to develop an anti-poverty strategy."

For a family of four with two adults and two children, the threshold of poverty in 2007 was annual income of \$21,027.

1 in 3 children

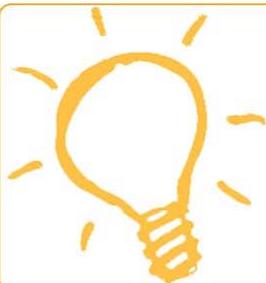
Children continue to bear a disproportionate burden of poverty in Milwaukee. The latest numbers show that more than one in three children in the city lives in poverty.

"Poverty affects the development of children's brains and it affects it in multiple ways," said Deborah McNelis, an early childhood specialist with the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. "If children develop in a situation that is going to optimally develop their brain, we'll all benefit. Economically we're going to benefit, socially we'll benefit. If we have well-developed children in all areas, everyone benefits."

The only silver lining in the numbers is that Milwaukee's poverty rate declined slightly from 2006. Still, Milwaukee actually moved up one place on the list of America's most impoverished cities.

"What these numbers say is there is such a high concentration of poverty, very systemic strategic

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changes need to be made, not just on the economy, but how children are receiving early education, how low-skilled adults have access to training," said Charity Eleson, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

Low rates near city

Outside Milwaukee, poverty rates were very low, not just in Waukesha County, but also in Washington County (5.2%) and Ozaukee County (5.1%). Milwaukee County's overall poverty rate was 17.8%.

In Wisconsin, 588,287 people, or 10.8% of the population, lived in poverty, including 187,000 children statewide.

"Sometimes we feel like the economy is a force of nature, with bull and bear markets, as if there is nothing mere humans can do to affect it. But there are proposals out there, work place standards we should be promoting, figuring out the transit issues so people who need jobs can get to them," said Pamela Fendt, director of the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition.

Nationally, the poverty rate was 12.5%, with 37.3 million people in poverty in 2007, up from 36.5 million in 2006.

Meanwhile, median household income in the United States rose to \$50,233, a 1.3% increase.

In Wisconsin, median household income was \$50,578, a 1% increase from 2006, but still behind the \$50,828 figure recorded in 2000. Three of the four counties with the highest median household incomes in the state were in southeastern Wisconsin - Ozaukee County (\$74,665), Waukesha County (\$72,073) and Washington County (\$65,357).

"It's not only the very poor who haven't benefited

from a period of economic growth, it's also people in more moderate income levels," Eleson said.

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