

SILENT VIGIL FOR PEACE

In front of Borough Hall Monday nights from 5:30-6:30. This vigil is silent and peaceful in the Quaker tradition. Feel free to join us. Bring a candle and a peaceful sign if you wish.

We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee.

-- Marian Wright Edelman

September 26, 2003

CENSUS BUREAU POVERTY DATA INDICATE INCREASING HARDSHIP

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the U.S. Census Bureau released its annual reports on income and poverty, as well as a report on experimental measures of poverty. The data show what has been known for the past three years – more and more families are struggling to make ends meet. Among the key findings from the reports:

- The number of people in poverty increased by 1.7 million, to nearly 35 million in 2002, raising the official poverty rate from 11.7% in 2001 to 12.1% in 2002.
- The number of children in poverty increased by nearly one-half million children so that in 2002, 16.7% of children were poor. Children under 6 living in female-headed households were particularly vulnerable to poverty, 48.6% were poor.
- The number of people living in “severe” poverty (those with incomes below 50% of the poverty line) increased from 13.4 million in 2001 to 14.1 million in 2002.
- The poverty rate increased for married-couple families (from 4.9% in 2001 to 5.3% in 2002) and remained very high for female-headed families at 26.5%.
- Median household money income declined in 2002 to \$42,400 (\$500 less than the 2001 level).
- The Midwest was the only region showing a decline in median household income, and was also the only region to have an increase in its poverty rate between 2001 and 2002.
- The South continues to have the lowest median household income and the highest poverty rate.

The data mark the end of the economic growth and prosperity experienced during the late 1990's. While the nation experienced historically low rates of poverty and high incomes in 2000, median income has decreased each year since that year and roughly three million more people have fallen into poverty. Unfortunately, the hardship has continued even through the economic recovery. Since the recession officially ended, in November 2001, the economy has lost over 1.1 million jobs. Of the 1.7 million people who were added to the ranks of the poor in 2002, over one million were working age people (between the ages of 18 and 64) and 1.2 million lived in the suburbs. The data points to the increasing phenomena of working class or professional suburbanites losing their jobs, remaining unemployed longer, and ultimately, slipping into poverty.

In addition, the disparities in poverty and income based on race, ethnicity, and citizenship, which seemed to be narrowing during the time of prosperity, remain very large. In 2002, only 8% of Whites were poor, while roughly 21%, 22%, and 24% of non-citizens, Hispanics, and Blacks, respectively were poor. Also, the median income of Whites (\$46,900) was roughly \$15,000 higher than that of African Americans (\$29,177) and Hispanics (\$33,103). Non-citizen households experienced a very sharp decline in median income from \$35,366 in 2001 to \$33,980 in 2002.

