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ARIZONA POVERTY RATE FOR FAMILIES SHOWS SLIGHT DECLINE IN 2016, BUT SITUATION REMAINS TROUBLING

Food Insecurity Decline is Statistically Insignificant; Numbers Still Much Too High

PHOENIX, Ariz. (Sept. 14): Arizona's median income was up slightly in 2016 and household poverty rates were down a bit in 2016, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics released today, but the number of families facing challenges of food insecurity barely changed at all, showing that poverty remains a significant problem in Arizona and nationwide, said Cynthia Zwick, executive director of the Arizona Community Action Association and Angie Rodgers, CEO of the Association of Arizona Food Banks.

"While it is encouraging to see progress, even small steps, it makes absolutely no sense for Congress and the current administration to propose cuts in programs that help our most vulnerable citizens. We need to be making long-term investments to protect and strengthen our safety net supports and redoubling our efforts to continue poverty reduction. We need to strengthen, not repeal, the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid," Zwick said.

"Any decline in the poverty rate is encouraging, but there are still more than 2.6 million Arizonans who are uncertain of their next meal," Rodgers said. "We know there is a way out, but it's not by cutting programs that provide temporary assistance to Arizona families in need. The proposed House budget could take away \$280 million from the state's most vulnerable people, namely children, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities."

Census Bureau statistics show that 11.9 percent of 1.64 million Arizona families were living below the Federal poverty line in 2016 compared with 12.5 percent of 1.59 million families in 2015. Hispanic or Latino families comprised the largest segment, 21 percent in 2016 and 24 percent in 2015. Caucasian families represented 9.7 percent in 2016 and 10.4 percent in 2015 while African American families comprised 19.4 percent in 2016 and 17.7 in 2015.

Median household income (adjusted for inflation) in Arizona rose to \$53,588 in 2016 from \$52,199 the year before.

Data from the 2016 census and DES showed that over 410,000 Arizona households receive nutrition assistance in the form of SNAP benefits. Nearly 32 percent of these homes had at least one family member who was 60 or older. Almost 43 percent were home to an individual with a disability. Over 80 percent of SNAP households contained at least one adult who is working.

Nationally, the official poverty rate is down, median income is up and the percentage of uninsured Americans is lower than ever, but with 44.56 million people still poor and 27.5 million still uninsured, more progress is needed, Zwick and Rodgers agreed.

“Too many Americans are still being left behind in an economy that is working for some of us, but not for all,” Zwick said. “Too many Americans remain uninsured and we are not doing all we can to put public programs that we know fight poverty to their fullest use.”

Rodgers added that “budget proposals pending in Congress would exacerbate poverty in our nation, not alleviate it. Current proposals would reduce nutrition assistance, roll back Medicaid for millions of Americans and devastate other services that have helped families escape poverty. Arizonans care deeply about their struggling neighbors. If tax cuts are necessary, we should find ways to fund those without taking food from children, seniors and families.”

For the full Census Bureau report, go to www.census.gov.

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