



*For Immediate Release
September 29, 2013*

Contact: Robin Gahan, robin@virginiainterfaithcenter.org, 804-643-2474, ex. 114

Too Many Virginians Are Still Being Left Behind: Risk of Even More on the Brink

Richmond, VA – Today the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and the Coalition on Human Needs have released a report on poverty and income inequality in the Commonwealth. The report draws on new information released by the Census Bureau last week and indicates that poverty rates in Virginia were higher in 2013 (11.7 percent) than in 2009 (10.5 percent). The persistence of poverty and increased inequality are evidenced by hunger, poor educational outcomes, and the growing gap between poor and rich. The report calls on Congress to invest in, not cut, proven programs to reverse these alarming trends.

"Anti-poverty programs work to keep poverty in check. But poverty persists in Virginia for too many struggling families and even working families are not exempt," said Marco Grimaldo, CEO and President of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. "We need to focus on interventions that work like SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to name a few."

While our safety net programs are effective in keeping millions of people out of poverty and in keeping many from becoming more deeply poor, they do not reach everyone. Recent cuts to these programs have left them less able to help the number of people who need it. One-third of the nation and more than one-quarter of Virginia live below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, or less than \$47,668 for a family four. In Virginia, nearly one in ten households struggled to put food on the table (were "food insecure"). Further, we know how important education is in fighting poverty, in Virginia, one out of five people who drop out of high school is poor.

"The thirty community action agencies across Virginia report that demand for programs and services remains very high--whether it is job training or help finding a job, energy assistance, help meeting monthly expenses or providing food for their families," said Jim Schuyler, Executive Director of the Virginia Community Action Partnership.

While poverty has grown since the recession, so too has inequality and at an alarming rate. The income of the top 1 percent of U.S. earners grew by 31.4 percent, while incomes for the other 99 percent grew only by 0.4 percent. This is an unprecedented increase in income inequality in U.S. history. The increase in tax breaks and loopholes for the wealthiest Americans occurs while those at the bottom are struggling to get by daily.

"Virginia is much wealthier than the nation as a whole, so it can afford to help its people escape poverty," said Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director of the Coalition on Human Needs. "But nearly 30 percent of Virginia's African American children are living in poverty, and nearly 1 million people in Virginia lack health insurance, many of whom could be covered if the state expanded Medicaid. These failures are wrong today and threaten the Commonwealth's future prosperity."

Strong federal programs create jobs, grow the economy, reduce inequality, and keep millions out of poverty. Automatic funding cuts or bad budget proposals, and plans that claim to fight poverty by turning social services into block grants, could actually increase poverty and make the situation worse. We need more investments, not less, in programs that help people move up and out of poverty.

[The report can be viewed online here.](#)

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy is Virginia's oldest faith-based advocacy group. We are a broadly diverse, morally driven group of advocates working to advance public policies that better serve low-income, vulnerable, and underrepresented communities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Center also serves as the state affiliate for the national Half in Ten campaign. For more information visit www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org

The Coalition on Human Needs is an alliance of national organizations work to promote public policies that address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. The Coalition's members include civil rights, religious, labor and professional organizations and those concerned with the well being on women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. For more information visit: www.chn.org