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Report Shows Too Many Washingtonians Are Still Being Left Behind After the Great Recession's End

Olympia, WA – Today the Washington State Community Action Partnership and the Coalition on Human Needs have released a report on poverty and income in Washington State. The report draws on new information released by the Census Bureau last week and indicates that poverty rates in Washington were higher in 2013 (14.1 percent) than in 2009 (12.3 percent). The persistence of poverty is 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: in Washington, 199,000 people were kept out of poverty by tax credits for low-income working families. But poverty persists in Washington for too many struggling families, including nearly 13 percent of working families,” said CEO of Community Action of Skagit County and Board President of the Washington State Community Action Partnership. “We need to focus on interventions that work like SNAP/food stamps, Head Start, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to name a few.”

While our basic assistance 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 nearly one third of Washingtonians live below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, or less than \$37,104 for a family of three. According to data released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture this month, one in seven Washington households struggled to put food on the table (were “food insecure”) in 2013. Further, we know how important education is in fighting poverty, in Washington, one out of four people who have not finished high school is poor, compared with only 11 percent for those with some post-high school education. While our basic assistance programs are effective in keeping millions of people out of poverty and in keeping many from becoming more deeply poor, too many are left behind. Recent cuts to these programs

Benton-Franklin Community Action Committee, Blue Mountain Action Council, Central Area Motivation Program, Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council, Coastal Community Action Program, Community Action Center, Community Action Partnership, CAC of Lewis, Mason, Thurston Co., Clark County Dept. of Community Services, El Centro de la Raza, Hopelink, HopeSource, Kitsap Community Resources, Lower Columbia CAP, MDC, Multi-Service Center, Neighborhood House, Northwest Community Action Center, OIC of Washington, Okanogan Community Action Council, Olympic Community Action Programs, Opportunity Council, Pierce County Community Action Program, Rural Resources Community Action, Seattle Conservation Corp, Skagit County Community Action Agency, Solid Ground, Snohomish County Human Services Department, Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners, Washington-Gorge Action Programs

have left them less able to help the most vulnerable. At the same time, increased costs of living add even greater pressures on these families. In Washington, 41 percent of tenants are paying 35 percent of their income on rent. According to data released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture this month, one in seven Washington households struggled to put food on the table in 2013.

"The thirty community action agencies across Washington State report that demand for programs and services remains very high - whether job training, help finding a job, emergency energy assistance, providing food for their families, or keeping out of debt" said Merritt Mount, Executive Director of the Washington State Community Action Partnership.

While poverty has grown since the recession, so too has the opportunity gap, 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 disparity in U.S. history. The tax advantages for the top-earning Americans does not reach those at the bottom who struggle to get by daily.

"Washington is 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 one in five of Washington's children is poor - far too many. A shocking 41 percent of African American children are poor in the state, far higher than the grim national average of 37 percent. One in three Hispanic children is growing up in poverty in the state and the nation. Failure to invest adequately in protecting children's nutrition, health, education and development will threaten Washington's future prosperity, and the nation's."

Public funds contributing to proven programs create jobs, grow the economy, reduce inequality, and keep millions from falling into poverty. Washington needs smart investments in proven programs that help stabilize struggling Washington families, equip them to exit poverty, and strengthen communities for all of us.

The report can be found here www.wapartnership.org.