



PRESS RELEASE

August 29, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Census Data Doesn't Show Improvement in NM Poverty ... Or Does It?

ALBUQUERQUE—It's a case of good news/bad news. First the good news: New Mexico has dropped from ranking 3rd in the nation for poverty (in 2004) to ranking 4th (2005). Now the bad news: That doesn't mean New Mexico is winning the war on poverty.

While the poverty rate in New Mexico has decreased slightly, what the ranking change reflects instead is that poverty is on the rise in the District of Columbia, which now ranks 3rd. They just make us look better by comparison.

The rankings, released today by the U.S. Census Bureau, are from the American Community Survey (ACS). The Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), also released today, shows no statistically significant change in poverty rates for New Mexico or the nation. In New Mexico, 17.2% of residents live in poverty. The national average is 12.7%.

"I'm a little surprised New Mexico's poverty rate didn't improve more this year," said Gerry Bradley, research director for NM Voices for Children. The state has seen strong job growth since 2004, but that hasn't translated into higher median income – at least not yet. "Next year, our poverty rate should be considerably better," said Bradley, as the 2006 data will reflect continued job growth.

As with any data, numbers don't always tell the whole story. For example, according to the 2000 Census, New Mexico's homeownership rate is higher than the national average. Meanwhile, the Center for Enterprise Development ranks New Mexico 50th in household net worth. Why don't high homeownership rates translate into high household net worth? What the numbers don't show is that while lots of New Mexicans own their homes, lots of those are mobile homes – which decrease in value rather than increase.

While the rise in job quantity and quality indicates that New Mexico is going in the right direction, the country as a whole should be faring better as it moves into the fifth year of an economic recovery. Along with stagnating poverty rates, real wages have not kept up with increasing productivity or inflation, and the income inequality gap continues to widen.

The census report is available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60-231.pdf>

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

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