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For Immediate Release
September 29, 2009

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New Census Data Show Families Continuing to Struggle Coordinated Approach Needed to Reverse Trend and Address Impact of Recession

Madison – Wisconsin’s 2008 poverty rate remained considerably higher than it was in 2000, and showed only slight improvement over 2007, according to data released today by the US Census Bureau. This is consistent with census data on household income; the typical Wisconsin working family’s income, when adjusted for inflation, has declined significantly since the beginning of the decade.

Newly released data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) show that Wisconsin’s overall poverty rate declined slightly from 10.8% in 2007 to 10.4% in 2008. The child poverty rate dropped from 14.4% in 2007 to 13.3% in 2008. However, these figures do not capture the bulk of the impact of the recession, as evidenced by dramatic 2009 increases in eligibility for a wide range of support services in Wisconsin, including FoodShare and free and reduced school lunch, as well as the number of families enrolled in BadgerCare Plus with incomes below the poverty line.

Overall, about 569,000 Wisconsin residents (including 172,000 children) lived in poverty in 2008. Wisconsin’s overall and child poverty rates remain substantially better than the national rates, but by less of a margin than in 2000 and earlier. Nationally, the 2008 overall poverty rate was 13.2%, and the child poverty rate was 18.2 percent; both are similar to the previous year’s figures. The federal poverty level for a family of four in 2008 was \$21,200.

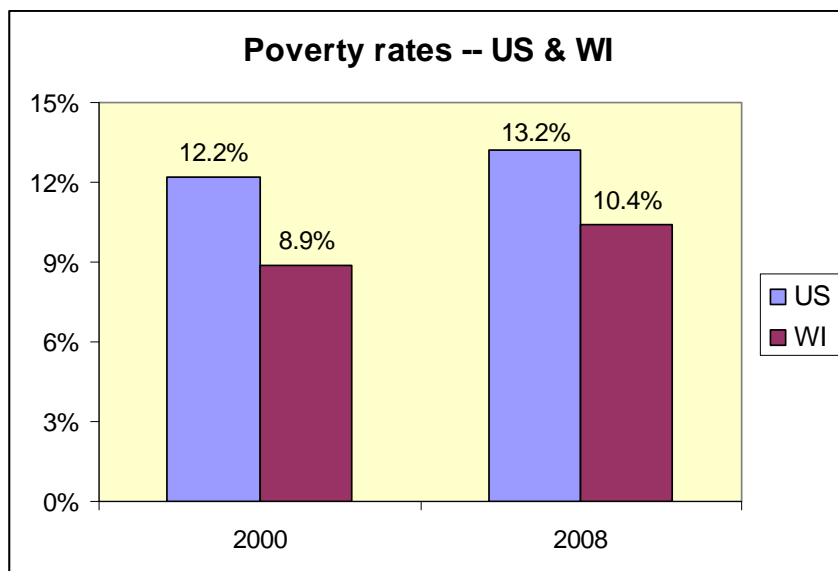
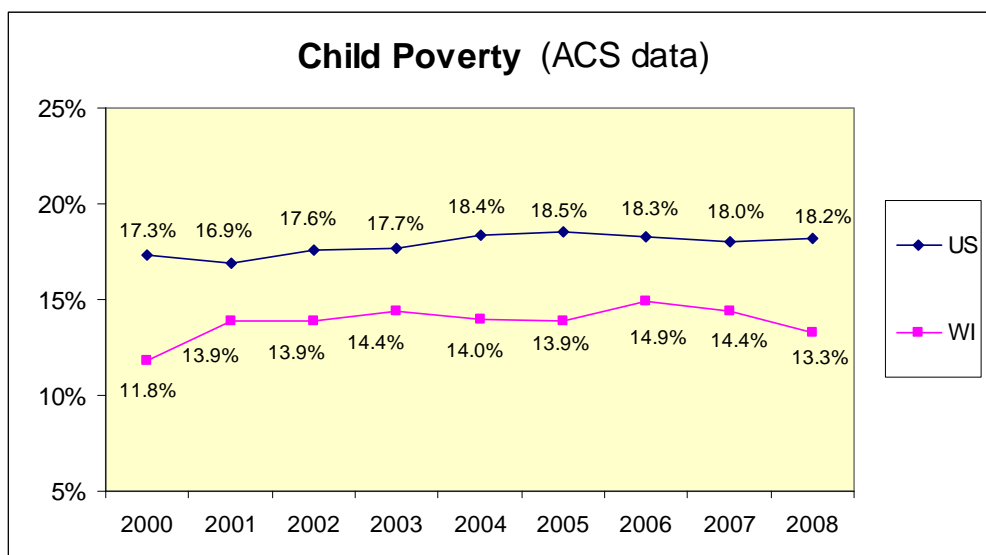
“It’s always encouraging to see poverty numbers improve, but the evidence is overwhelming that we’ve lost all of that ground and more since this data was collected,” said Jim Moeser, acting executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). “Agencies in the business of helping struggling families are swamped beyond anything they’ve experienced in decades.”

Examples of the recent dramatic increase in need include:

- The number of people in the state enrolled in FoodShare (which is capped at 130% of the poverty level) increased by 26% (more than 127,000) in the first 8 months of 2009 (compared to December 2008).
- The number of children and parents enrolled in BadgerCare Plus who are below the poverty level increased by more than 58,000, or 18%, over the first eight months of 2009.
- The number of Wisconsin elementary school students receiving free and reduced school lunch increased by 5,794 between the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years.

WCCF, in partnership with the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association and the Wisconsin Head Start Association, has launched a campaign to end child poverty in the state. The campaign, called Vision 2020 (www.2020wi.org), focuses on concrete solutions grounded in public policy. Vision 2020 addresses poverty on four key fronts: family-supporting jobs; access to high-quality early care and education; health care; and safe and affordable housing. Nearly 1,200 individuals and organizations have signed on to the campaign to date.

“The Census Bureau data and other indicators make it clear that we need a coordinated, strategic plan to tackle child poverty in Wisconsin,” Moeser said. “The Vision 2020 campaign is a way for public officials, citizens and organizations to get involved in a tangible, focused way. Poverty need not be something we just accept as inevitable. We can address these issues, and Vision 2020 provides a roadmap for doing so.”



Complete US Census Data is available at www.census.gov. For more information about Vision 2020, visit www.2020wi.org.