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Number of people living in poverty in Ohio continues to increase

More than 1.75 million Ohio residents, or 15.2% of all Ohioans, are living below the poverty line, according to the American Community Survey results for 2009 released this week by the U.S. Census Bureau.

This is a significant increase from 2008, when 13.4% of all Ohioans lived in poverty.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 43.6 million Americans are living in poverty. This represented an increase of nearly 4 million Americans living in poverty in just one year.

The American Community Survey results released this week also show that:

- 11.1% of all families in Ohio live below the poverty line, an increase from 9.7% in 2008.
- 33.9% of all families with single mothers live below the poverty line.
- 163,365 Ohio families have an annual income of less than \$10,000 per year.

U.S. Census figures on Athens County and all individual counties in Ohio will be available in December.

Poverty is a crisis in Ohio and in America, and our leaders need to be focusing on ways to increase public assistance and help families in need. Instead, they have cut assistance to the poor while extending tax cuts to the rich and spending billions of dollars bailing out Wall Street.

“What we need is a change of heart by our Congressional representatives and our President,” Athens County Job and Family Services Director Jack Frech said. Despite the numerous reports on poverty in America and the Dateline NBC special that focused on poverty, our political leaders have ignored the plight of the poor.

Today’s public assistance benefits are inadequate and do not allow families to meet their basic needs. This includes more than 3 million children receiving assistance from the reformed welfare system.

In addition, drastic state and federal budget cuts in recent years have reduced benefits in some important programs and forced the elimination of several other vital

assistance programs, including one that helped Athens County residents pay for car repairs and clothing items they need to become employed and keep their jobs.

The new Census figures on poverty in America shouldn't surprise our political leaders, but should make them ashamed that they have not done more to help.

"These problems have been well-known and exacerbated for years by our political leaders at the state and national level," Frech said.

Recently, for example, Congress, with the support of The White House, chose to cut nearly \$12 billion in funding to the Food Stamps program in order to pay for a bill to bail out the teachers and Medicaid providers. Clearly at a time of such severe hardships for poor families, other resources could have been found to pay for the bill.

Congress is also currently considering further cuts to Food Stamps.

It is discouraging that so many people of all ages are living in poverty today in the richest country in the world and that our political leaders are not taking action to help these poor children, adults and senior citizens.

It is time to stop ignoring the poor. It is time to take action to help.