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New survey shows Ohioans' opinions on poverty

Ohio residents want state leaders do more to help people living in poverty, but they have differing views on how best to help the poor.

An Ohio University communications class surveyed Ohio voters earlier this year about their opinions on poverty in Ohio, and found these and other results. Here are just a few examples of the survey results:

- 83% of the respondents said that poverty should be a high concern for Ohio legislators.
- 86% of the respondents said that a family of three cannot pay for its monthly necessities on \$960 per month, which is the maximum amount that a family of three can receive in cash and food assistance in one month in Ohio.
- Two-thirds of the respondents say poor people are not better off than they were in 2005.
- Respondents were split on the issue of whether or not public assistance benefits should be increased.
- The majority of respondents do not favor increasing taxes to help the poor.

The survey was completed during a time when the national economic problems are forcing more people to rely on government assistance programs. From 2008 to 2009, the state unemployment rate jumped from 6.6% to 10.2%. In Athens County, the unemployment rate climbed from 6.6% to 8.6% during the same time period.

The number of people receiving food and/or cash assistance has also risen. In 2009, the state paid out more than \$2.3 billion in Food Assistance benefits and \$410.7 million in Ohio Works First cash assistance benefits. In Ohio, 13.2% of all people are currently living in poverty, while in Athens County 30.2% of the residents are living in poverty.

But while the number of poor people in Ohio has risen rapidly in recent years, the state funding for programs to help the poor has been cut significantly. This survey shows that while Ohio residents may not agree on how best to fight poverty, they strongly want state leaders to do more to help the poor. The survey will be discussed at a **press conference at noon on Friday, May 28 in Ohio University's Lasher Hall, Room 104**, and all area residents are invited to attend.