



Mississippi  
Economic Policy  
Center

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**HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO ‘GET BY’ IN MISSISSIPPI?**  
*Report Details New State Self-Sufficiency Standard*

*County-By-County Data Available*  
*Online Calculator Will Allow Individuals to Calculate Their Own Self Sufficiency*

JACKSON – A new report, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Mississippi 2009*, measures how much it takes for families in Mississippi to meet their basic needs and provides a clear picture of what it takes for Mississippians to get by. It tracks and measures the true cost of living facing families, illuminating the economic “squeeze” experienced by Mississippi families today.

A press conference in Jackson to release the report will be held at 10:30 a.m., Tuesday, September 1 at Center Stage in the Jackson Medical Mall, and an audio news briefing to review the report will be held via toll-free number at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, September 1, at: 888-634-7543 (pass code: “Self-Sufficiency Report.”)

“The Self-Sufficiency Standard of Mississippi is a measure of income adequacy,” said Ed Sivak, director of the Mississippi Economic Policy Center. “The Standard varies by both family type and by geographic location because the amount of money families need to be economically self-sufficient depends on family size, composition, children’s ages and the county of residence. So, a basic level of income that works in Coahoma County is going to differ from what is needed for Hinds or Harrison Counties.”

The report enables individual residents of Mississippi to calculate their own level of self-sufficiency by going to [www.mepconline.org/self-sufficiency-standard/your-standard.php](http://www.mepconline.org/self-sufficiency-standard/your-standard.php). In addition, county-by-county data is available online by going to [www.mepconline.org/self-sufficiency-standard/](http://www.mepconline.org/self-sufficiency-standard/).

The 2009 report, which is a follow up to the first Self-Sufficiency Standard issued in 2003, explains how the Standard differs from the official Federal Poverty Level; how it is calculated; what an adequate income is for Mississippi families; and how various public work supports, public policies, child support and other resources can help families move toward self-sufficiency. This report concludes with a discussion of the varied ways the Self-Sufficiency Standard can be used as a tool for education and training, policy analysis, counseling, performance evaluation, and research.

“The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen wages stagnate and income inequality increase in the United States to ever higher levels,” explained Dr. Diana Pearce, director of the Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington School of Social Work, and author of the report. “As a result, more and more families are unable to stretch their wages to meet the costs of basic necessities. Many of these families are not

deemed ‘poor’ by the official federal poverty measure, yet they lack enough income to meet the rising costs of food, housing, transportation, health care, and other essentials.”

The report explains that Mississippi’s most common occupations have wages that are on average below the minimum level of self-sufficiency, and includes recommendations for closing the income gap by using two basic approaches: raising incomes and reducing costs through workforce support programs. In addition to providing child care assistance, supplemental nutrition assistance and Child Health Insurance Program services, recommendations for accomplishing those goals include, among others:

- Increasing access to higher education
- Providing targeted training for higher-wage jobs
- Increasing women’s access to nontraditional jobs
- Implementing policies that encourage Individual Development Accounts or family Savings Accounts

The report defines the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a more accurate measure of income adequacy than the Federal Poverty Level because the Standard tracks and measures the true cost of living facing American families, illuminating the economic “squeeze” experienced by so many today.

Mississippi is one of 37 states and the District of Columbia with a Self-Sufficiency Standard. At the national level, work on the incorporation of the Self-Sufficiency Standard and the concept of self-sufficiency in federal law and policy, such as in workforce training and “green jobs” programs, is led by Wider Opportunities for Women.

Mississippi’s report was authored by Dr. Diana Pearce, director of the Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington School of Social Work, with support from the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta, Mississippi Economic Policy Center, the Women’s Fund of Mississippi and the William Winter Institute on Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi.

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### **About the Mississippi Economic Policy Center**

The Mississippi Economic Policy Center is an independent, nonpartisan initiative that undertakes rigorous and timely analysis on issues that affect the economic and social well-being of working families and low-wealth Mississippians. MEPC is managed by the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta, a regional financial institution and community development intermediary dedicated to strengthening communities, building assets and improving lives in economically distressed areas across the Mid South. More information is available on-line at [www.mepconline.org](http://www.mepconline.org).

### **About the Center for Women’s Welfare**

The Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington School of Social Work is devoted to furthering the goal of economic justice for women and their families. The main work of the Center focuses on the development of the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The Center partners with a range of government, non-profit, women’s, children’s, and community-based groups to research and evaluate public policy related to income adequacy; create tools to assess and establish income adequacy; and to develop programs and policies that strengthen public investment in low-income women, children, and families. For more information about the Center’s programs, or work related to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, call (206) 685-5264.

### **About the Women’s Fund of Mississippi**

The Women’s Fund of Mississippi is dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls and promoting long-term social change through fundraising, strategic grantmaking, and advocacy. More information is available on-line at [www.womensfundms.org](http://www.womensfundms.org).

**About the William Winter Institute on Racial Reconciliation**

The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation fosters reconciliation and civic renewal wherever people suffer as a result of racial discrimination or alienation, and promotes scholarly research, study and teaching on race and the impact of race and racism.