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Michelle Bazie Contact

202-408-1080, bazie@cbpp.org

820 First Street, NE
Suite 510
Washington, DC 20002

Tel: 202-408-1080
Fax: 202-408-1056

center@cbpp.org
www.cbpp.org

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AS HOLIDAYS APPROACH, DATA SHOW HIGH RATES OF HARDSHIP FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATINOS Government Survey of Hardships Slated for Elimination This Year

A new Center analysis of data on hardships faced by American families — based on an annual survey the Administration plans to eliminate this fiscal year — shows that between one-fourth and one-third of all African American and Latino citizen families experience difficulty affording food, lack needed medical care, and/or live in overcrowded conditions.

Twenty-eight percent of African American families with children, and 31 percent of families headed by a Latino citizen, experience at least one of the above three hardships at some point during the year, according to the survey. This is double the rate for non-Latino white families with children (14 percent). This disparity largely reflects the fact that poverty rates are several times higher for African American and Latino families than for white families.

“When families lack adequate access to food, medical care, or housing, it not only causes them immediate problems but can lessen the chances that parents and children will be able to improve their lives, such as by advancing in their job or education,” said Arloc Sherman, a senior researcher at the Center and author of the Center’s report.

The Census Bureau survey — called the Survey of Income and Program Participation, or SIPP — reflects conditions as of 2003. While the Agriculture Department recently released newer data on food-related hardships, SIPP is uniquely valuable. SIPP provides the most wide-ranging government data on family hardships, income and resources, and living conditions, showing how different types of hardship can overlap. In addition to hardship data, SIPP also provides unique data on whether government programs are targeting their resources effectively on people in need, as well as a variety of information on Americans’ wealth, assets, income fluctuations, child care expenses, and other topics.

The Administration plans to terminate SIPP in response to low overall funding levels from Congress for the Census Bureau. Congress can preserve SIPP by providing additional funding in the fiscal year 2007 appropriations bill that funds the Census Bureau.

“If this survey is eliminated, we will lose one of our best means of understanding what it’s like to be poor in this country,” Sherman said.

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The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization and policy institute that conducts research and analysis on a range of government policies and programs. It is supported primarily by foundation grants.
