

**NEWS****Report reveals true cost of living in state**[Print Page](#)**By Staff reports**

Published: Friday, September 4, 2009 10:39 PM CDT

The Mississippi Economic Policy Center released a new report this week that measures how much income a family in the state would need to handle their basic necessities.

According to the report's authors, Mississippians working at the most common occupations have wages on average below the minimum level of self-sufficiency. The study, titled the "Self-Sufficiency Standard for Mississippi 2009" tracked and measured the true cost of living facing the state's families today.

The report calculates how much a family needs to earn to live in their county without any government or private assistance. The amount varies based on the county of residence, the type of family (one parent or two parents) and the number and ages of children.

"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 2009 report is a follow up to the first Self-Sufficiency Standard issued in 2003.

"The first decade of the 21st century has seen wages stagnate and income inequality increase in the United States to ever higher levels," said 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."

In DeSoto County, the self-sufficiency standard for one adult is \$19,533. The number increases to \$29,273 for one adult and one preschool-age child. The standard for two adults, one infant and one preschool-age child is \$44,017.

The study factors in such costs as housing, childcare, food, transportation and health care.

In neighboring Tate County, the standard for one adult is only \$16,731. The number for two adults, one infant and one preschool-age child is \$42,839.

The report offers 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

Copyright © 2009 - Desoto Times Tribune

[\[x\] Close Window](#)