



WOMEN'S FOUNDATION
FOR A GREATER MEMPHIS

8 South Third Street, Suite 110 ♦ Memphis, Tennessee 38103
901.578.9346 ♦ 901.578.9446 (fax) ♦ www.wfgm.org

On August 27, 2008, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* printed the article, "Poverty Rate in Shelby Up, Census Finds," <http://commercialappeal.com/news/2008/aug/27/poverty-rate-in-shelby-up-census-finds/>. This letter was written as a response to that article, and the *Commercial Appeal* published it in the Letters to the Editor section on September 8, 2008.

August 28, 2008

Dear Editor:

POVERTY has always had strong, unwanted presence here in Memphis and the Shelby County community. It has continued to grow at an increasingly higher rate than the national average, especially over the past seven years. On August 27, *The Commercial Appeal* reported only a fraction of the reality (*Poverty Rate in Shelby Up, Census Finds*) – Shelby County, Tennessee and the United States have a persistently high poverty rate. There is so much more to the story.

According to a new report from the Census Bureau, children are more likely to be poor than any other age group. In Shelby County, over 30.6% of children were poor in 2007 compared to 27.7% in 2006. The national average sits at 17% – the rate for child poverty here is nearly double. Setting a national goal to reduce poverty is long overdue and should be an immediate call to action in Memphis and Shelby County. The need is especially urgent now, because the Census Bureau is reporting on findings that precede the current economic downturn. As disturbing as the 2007 statistics are, it is certain that more children are poorer today, as parents struggle to afford rising food and fuel prices with lower earnings.

In addition, previous years of economic growth did not reduce the overall number or proportion of poor people in Shelby County. In fact, those figures nearly doubled from 12.4% in 2000 to 20.3% in 2007. In Tennessee as a whole, five years of economic growth only slightly reduced the number and proportion of poor people in Tennessee. And that growth was not shared by middle-income workers, who lost ground.

We've got to do better. The organizations supported by the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis see growing numbers of women and children in need, especially now that the economy is in trouble. To turn things around, we need shared prosperity. We need stronger commitments locally and nationally to reduce poverty, and we need to make it a goal to cut poverty by at least half in 10 years, a goal now espoused by many groups in close to 20 cities or states.

As a first step, we encourage everyone to join the Women's Foundation in supporting efforts for a Poverty Impact Statement at all levels. In September, our Congress should enact an economic recovery package with help for the unemployed, as well as food, energy, and Medicaid assistance so people can get what they urgently need. The package should also help more poor children through the Child Tax Credit.

The problem is too important for us to ignore any longer. We need to stand up and demand some real dialogue for lasting solutions!

Ruby Bright
Executive Director

Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis

TENNESSEE AND SHELBY COUNTY 2007 CENSUS POVERTY REPORT

Percent of People Below the Poverty Line

	State of Tennessee	Shelby County
2005	15.5%	18.3%
2006	16.2%	18.3%
2007	15.9%	20.1%

Percent of Children under 18 years Below the Poverty level

	State of Tennessee	Shelby County
2005	21.4%	26.7%
2006	22.7%	27.7%
2007	23.0%	30.6%

Poverty Status of Families with Children under the Age of 18

Family Description	State of Tennessee			Shelby County		
	2005	2006	2007	2005	2006	2007
All Families	12.5%	12.4%	12.0%	15.7%	14.0%	16.1%
Married Couples Families	6.4%	5.8%	5.6%	4.2%	3.3%	4.0%
FemaleHead of Household, No Husband Present	33.7%	35.5%	34.3%	36.5%	32.7%	39.2%

Poverty Status by Age and Race

Subject	State of Tennessee			Shelby County		
	2005	2006	2007	2005	2006	2007
Total Population for Whom Poverty Status is Determined	15.5%	16.2%	16.2%	18.3%	18.3%	20.1%
Age						
Under the age of 18	21.4%	22.7%	23.0%	26.7%	27.7%	30.6%
Sex						
Male	14.2%	13.7%	13.9%	15.6%	16.6%	18.0%
Female	18.1%	17.3%	17.8%	20.7%	19.9%	22.0%
Race						
White	13.9%	13.3%	12.8%	7.4%	6.5%	7.9%
African American	26.7%	28.3%	26.7%	27.7%	28.0%	30.5%
Asian	9.3%	11.0%	11.5%	N/A	N/A	25.1%
Hispanic or Latin origin	24.0%	31.4%	28.0%	21.0%	26.9%	25.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. www.census.gov
Compiled by The Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis