

HEARTLAND ALLIANCE

ENDING POVERTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FUTURE OF NATION'S POOR HANGS IN THE BALANCE AS DEEPER BUDGET CUTS LOOM

NEW CENSUS DATA SHOWS NO PROGRESS ON POVERTY, DESPITE EMPLOYMENT GAINS

CHICAGO, IL, September 17, 2013 – New census data released today shows that no progress has been made in the fight against poverty, with 15.0% of the nation (46.5 million people) still struggling to put food on the table and a roof over their heads. Although the rate hasn't changed since last year, it is considerably higher than pre-recession levels of 12.5% in 2007.

State and local data for counties and cities with a population larger than 65,000 will be available to the media via embargo today at 2 p.m. EDT and released on September 19.

Job growth numbers are often viewed as a sign of hope, but these data tell a different story. Despite the fact that over 2.7 million more Americans were working in 2012, there was no corresponding decrease in poverty. The post-recession growth in low-wage, temporary work is keeping people in at the bottom economic rung in our country from moving up.

"This is particularly concerning because more people are working now and more are working full-time year round, yet poverty hasn't budged," commented Samantha Tuttle, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Heartland Alliance. "If Illinois wants to fight poverty, we need to raise the minimum wage. Had it kept pace with inflation, the minimum wage would be over \$10 today."

As Congress puts SNAP, the national food stamp program, on the chopping block this week, the future of the nation's poor and any prospects for improvement in these numbers hangs in the balance.

"SNAP is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty; if it were counted as income, it would lift 4 million people out of poverty in this country. Cutting SNAP will have devastating personal and community consequences and is simply short-sighted and not a smart long-term plan," said Tuttle. "In Illinois, over 2 million people depend on SNAP benefits to feed their families; any cuts would be devastating for our state."

In Illinois, the ongoing budget crisis stands to put a permanent blockade in the fight against poverty.

"If state lawmakers don't address Illinois's ongoing budget crisis, all state residents, but disproportionately so those who are poor, will be adversely impacted. Providing vital services and balancing the state budget is not an either/or proposition. A responsible solution to the fiscal crisis must include exploring ways to responsibly increase revenue, shared sacrifice in allocating limited resources, and strategic spending decisions."

The data did show one positive sign: the rate of people without health insurance has declined, from 15.7% in 2011 to 15.4% in 2012. With open enrollment under Affordable Care Act set to start in just two weeks on October 1st with benefits kicking in on January 1st, 2014, the uninsured rate should continue on this

downward trend. In Illinois, over 300,000 people will be newly eligible for Medicaid and able to enroll on October 1st.

ACCESS DATA HERE: http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/income_wealth/cb13-165.html

Heartland Alliance – the leading anti-poverty organization in the Midwest – believes that all of us deserve the opportunity to improve our lives. Each year, we help ensure this opportunity for more than one million people around the world who are homeless, living in poverty, or seeking safety. Our policy efforts strengthen communities; our comprehensive services empower those we serve to rebuild and transform their lives. For more information, visit: www.heartlandalliance.org or follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/heartlandhelps> or like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/heartlandalliance>.

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CONTACT: Allyson Stewart
Communications Coordinator, Heartland Alliance
alstewart@heartlandalliance.org
312.870.4940