

Contact: Price Arnett
Nuffer, Smith, Tucker
619/296-0605, ext. 234
pa@nstpr.com

MORE THAN FORTY PERCENT OF SENIORS IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY STRUGGLE TO MEET THEIR BASIC NEEDS

San Diegan Participates in State Assembly Subcommittee Hearing Today Regarding Study's Results

SAN DIEGO - Feb. 24, 2009 - According to a new study, more than one-third of San Diego's seniors fall below the Elder Economic Security Index for San Diego, but remain above the Federal Poverty Line, meaning they don't earn enough income to provide for their basic needs but don't qualify for assistance.

According to the latest findings, 41.8 percent (131,000 individuals) of San Diego County adults over the age of 65 have incomes that fall below the Elder Index. Additionally, 34.1 percent of seniors (107,000 individuals) fall below the Elder Index, but above the Federal Poverty Line. The gap between the Elder Index and the Federal Poverty Line, means that individuals who don't fall below the poverty line may not qualify for public assistance programs, but are still thousands of dollars short of being able to provide for their basic needs.

In today's release, The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development have used the Elder Index to quantify, for the first time, how many seniors are struggling in San Diego County. Last February, the Elder Economic Security™ Index (Elder Index) debuted the true costs of housing, food, health care and other basic needs specifically for San Diego County's seniors, which was as much as \$20,000 above the Federal Poverty Line in some cases.

The quantifiable data, which was calculated using the most up-to-date U.S. Census Bureau ACS data available from 2006 and 2007, is being released in conjunction with a joint informational hearing of the Assembly Human Services Committee and the Aging & Long Term Care Committee today at the state Capitol. San Diegan Paul Downey - who is also president and CEO of San Diego-based Senior Community Centers - is presenting at the hearing to voice his concern over the Elder Index's findings in San Diego County and to urge lawmakers to replace the Federal Poverty Line with this modern, more accurate measure.

"Having more than forty percent of older adults in our community struggling to provide for their basic human needs clearly illustrates the antiquated measurements of the Federal Poverty Line," said Downey, whose organization provides nutritional, medical and mental health services, and housing assistance to low-income seniors. "With current economic woes and the

state budget crisis putting senior service providers in a serious pinch, we can only expect that the number of struggling seniors is higher than these numbers represent and will continue to rise.”

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The Elder Index for California, calculated by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, in partnership with other organizations, reveals that the Federal Poverty Line covers only a fraction of the basic costs experienced by adults age 65 and older – yet the Federal Poverty Line is used to determine income eligibility for most public programs, and state and federal resource allocations to local communities. Even seniors who have worked their entire lives and are now living on incomes comprised of Social Security, retirement accounts and pensions are finding that they are unable to cover the most basic expenses included in the Elder Index.

“The current Federal Poverty Line is an arbitrary calculation created more than 40 years ago that doesn’t take into account the variations of age or the cost of living throughout the nation,” said Susan Smith, Director of the California Elder Economic Security Initiative (Cal-EESI) at the Insight Center for Community Economic Development. “By quantifying the number of individuals who fall into this gap, the Elder Index provides us with a much-needed reality check. Our bill, the Elder Economic Dignity Act of 2009, would ensure that California uses this new tool to the fullest extent and empower seniors throughout California the opportunity to age with dignity.”

Led by the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, Cal-EESI is a statewide, research-driven initiative at the forefront of a national effort to raise awareness and promote policy change to ensure that older adults can live with dignity and economic well-being in their own homes. Using the Elder Index, Cal-EESI provides education, advocacy and outreach to policymakers, advocates, foundations and direct service providers.

The Elder Economic Security Standard Index was tabulated for the Insight Center for Community Economic Development by the Center for Health Policy Research at UCLA. It is based on the national methodology developed by WOW and the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Massachusetts

County specific data is available online at www.insightcced.org. For more information or to coordinate interview opportunities, please contact Price Arnett at 619/296-0605, ext. 234 or pa@nstpr.com.

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