

EDITORIALS

## No relief in sight

Gov. Mitch Daniels might be boasting to the national media that Indiana is in a building boom while Michigan grinds roads back into gravel. But the cold, hard numbers point to the everyday reality for a growing number of Hoosiers:

- More than 1 million Hoosiers – almost 1 in 6 – live below the poverty line.
- Indiana residents living below the poverty line increased from 12.9 percent in 2008 to an estimated 16.1 percent in 2009, compared to a national rate of 14.3 percent last year.
- Indiana ranked 12th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia for the number of residents in poverty, according to Census Bureau figures.
- Indiana ranked 48th for personal income growth in the second quarter; Michigan ranked 25th.

The figures should be a wake-up call for elected officials. If Indiana's economy is improving, it's improving unevenly. The number of Hoosiers in need is apparent from the increasing number of families whose children qualify for a free- or reduced-price lunch. Statewide, 44 percent of public school students came from households qualifying, compared to 36 percent in 2005. In Fort Wayne Community Schools, 68 percent of students qualified for a free- or reduced-price lunch last year.

The poverty-line figure shouldn't be confused with the amount of money families really need to get by. A new survey by the Indiana Institute for Working Families calculates the amount of annual income needed for a household with two adults and two school-age children to reach self-sufficiency at \$38,584 – 75 percent more than the poverty-line figure.

Short term, the statistics show an immediate need for assistance for struggling Hoosiers. The emphasis on meeting basic human needs by some groups, including United Way of Allen County and the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne, has helped the unemployed and working poor make ends meet when public assistance falls short. Those who can support non-profit service providers should do what they can to help.

Long term, the state needs to ensure scarce resources are targeted to support Hoosiers most affected by the recession. Indiana will never truly prosper as long as a growing segment of its population is living in poverty. Economic development efforts that create jobs leading to self-sufficiency must be the focus.

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