

## **New Jersey Catholic Conference**

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### State Budget Should Put the Poor and Most Vulnerable First

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Today the New Jersey Catholic Conference joined Legal Services of New Jersey Poverty Research Institute and The Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey in releasing “Eye on the Budget 2008.” This report is the fifth edition of an ongoing analysis of the State of New Jersey’s response to the basic human needs of the low-income and the most vulnerable residents of New Jersey. “This is a document we believe will help guide policy makers make sound and compassionate decisions as they consider cuts to the State Budget,” said Marlene Lao-Collins, Director of Social Concerns for the New Jersey Catholic Conference.

We believe government has an important and positive responsibility to ensure that no one goes without the basic material necessities of life. The State Budget, therefore, should address those priorities and values. While Governor Jon Corzine should be credited for including, in past budgets additional funding for child welfare, rental assistance and food banks. There is still much to be done to protect children and reduce poverty in New Jersey.

Using the federal measure, the statewide poverty rate for New Jersey’s total population was 8.7 percent in 2005, meaning an estimated 738,969 persons lived below the poverty line. If we use the true cost of living in New Jersey the number would be significantly higher. We also know that children are disproportionately impacted by poverty. Nearly 12 percent, or 251,999, of New Jersey children lived in poverty, as did 8.5 percent of seniors.

Policy decision concerning cuts to the State Budget should be carefully weighed against the needs of those who are less fortunate, the very poor, children, people with disabilities and mental illness, as well as the elderly.

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