



Wider Opportunities for Women

**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Joan Grangennois-Thomas

212-627-2404 or

[joan@makewavesnotnoise.com](mailto:joan@makewavesnotnoise.com)

**Introduction of a New Federal Poverty Line  
Measuring American Poverty Act - "Long Overdue"  
National and State Organizations Show Strong Support  
Call Federal Poverty Level "Unrealistic"**

Washington, DC - **Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)** and the **Insight Center for Community Economic Development** in Oakland, California strongly support the **Measuring American Poverty Act** recently introduced into the House of Representatives by Rep. James McDermott (D-WA). The Act updates the current measure of U.S. poverty, which is based on a formula designed in the 1960s and antiquated data from the 1950s.

*"Representative McDermott's proposal not only calls for using current data, but includes food, clothing, shelter and other necessities in its calculations. The present Federal Poverty Level is based only on the cost of food, which is completely unrealistic," said **Joan Kuriansky**, executive director of WOW. "Most important, the calculation proposed in the bill also allows for geographic differences in the cost of living. This is something that my organization and the Insight Center are addressing on behalf of working families and older adults through the **Elder Economic Security Initiative™**."*

*"Hundreds of thousands of Californians fall through the cracks of our public systems: they aren't considered "poor" by our one-size-fits-all federal poverty measure, but they still struggle to make ends meet in California's high cost market. California's elders are forced to choose between paying for life-sustaining medications and putting food on their table. We applaud Representative McDermott's long overdue efforts and appreciate Representative Pete Stark's (D-CA) thoughtful contributions at the hearing. The Insight Center urges Representatives Stark and Herger (R-CA), both members of the Subcommittee of Jurisdiction, to champion this legislation," said Susie Smith, Director, Californians for Economic Security at the Insight Center.*

The Elder Economic Security Initiative is a multi-year advocacy project to promote the economic well-being of elders. The cornerstone of this nationwide initiative is the Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (the Index) created by WOW in conjunction with the Gerontology Institute of the University of Massachusetts Boston. The Index provides a realistic, geography- based measure of income adequacy, which can be adjusted to reflect the

needs of specific living situations. The California Index was introduced by the Insight Center in February of this year.

Based on reliable public data sources, the Index is a tool that quantifies the actual costs of basic expenses for older adults. It measures how much income a senior requires to adequately meet his or her basic needs, without public or private assistance.

In addition to California, the Index has been introduced in four states so far this year. They are Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The response has been significant. In California, for instance, the Area Agencies on Aging incorporated the Index as a measure of economic vulnerability for direct service providers in case management programs. Also, the Insight Center received an invitation from state Assembly Member Jim Beall of San Jose to help draft a bill that would adopt the Index statewide.

In the first part of 2009, Wider Opportunities for Women expects to release Indexes for four additional states: Connecticut, New Jersey, Michigan and Minnesota.

*Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) leads two national networks promoting economic security within the United States: the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) focusing on the needs of low-income working families and the Elder Economic Security Initiative™ program, addressing what income seniors require to age in place. WOW works in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and at the federal level to promote programs and policies that accurately measure the income and assistance needs of families and the elderly. For more information, please visit [www.wowonline.org](http://www.wowonline.org).*

*The Insight Center for Community Economic Development is a national research, consulting, and legal organization dedicated to building economic health in vulnerable communities. Their mission is to develop and promote innovative solutions that help people and communities become, and remain, economically secure. The Insight Center leads the California Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) and the California Elder Economic Security Initiative. For more information, please visit [www.insightcced.org](http://www.insightcced.org).*