



**Wider  
Opportunities  
for Women**

**For Immediate Release**

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**Release of Michigan Data on Poverty Reinforces Need to Strengthen Housing Supports for Elders**

State poverty data released today in Michigan shows that economic security is an elusive goal for families of all ages. Released today by the American Community Survey, the overall poverty rate for 2008 increased to 14.4% in Michigan and for elders age 65 and over, the percentage of those in poverty was 8.7%. At a time when families of all ages are facing increased housing and health care costs, these poverty statistics reveal that growing numbers of Michigan elders are struggling to get by.

Further, the poverty rates released today fail to capture the true number of elders struggling to make ends meet. The [Michigan Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index](#) (Elder Index) provides a more realistic measure of what it costs to age in place. In 2008, the Elder Index for a single elder renter in good health was \$19,058, which stands in stark contrast to the federal poverty level for a person 65 and older, amounting to only \$10,830 in 2009. The Elder Index demonstrates that many seniors fall short of what they actually need to meet their basic needs, even though they are not considered impoverished under the official poverty definition.

Although never intended to be the sole source of income in retirement, one in four Michigan seniors live on Social Security alone, most of whom are women. Findings from the Michigan Elder Index, in Michigan, demonstrate that Social Security income alone fails to provide economic security. Social Security averaged just \$12,072 for older women, providing 49% to 75% of what a single elder needs to make ends meet depending on housing and health status.

“Because many more seniors must continue working into their retirement years, policies must be shaped to accommodate their need to develop new skills and to obtain flexible work arrangements. Like the many women who work part-time due to care-giving responsibilities, older workers deserve proportionate access to health, retirement and unemployment benefits, and they should be spared penalties on their pensions,” stated Joan Kuriansky, Executive Director of WOW.

These findings underscore the need to strengthen housing supports for seniors and create work opportunities for older adults. To this end, Elder Law of Michigan recommends the following:

- Advocate for increases in affordable and accessible housing. Maintain programs which protect the rights of renters and homeowners, help with housing costs and develop new ways to assist elders to remain in their own homes and communities.
- Create mechanisms to provide older adults, if they choose to do so, with options to remain in the workforce after age 65. Encourage employers to provide flexible schedules and benefits for employees of all ages.

Kate White, Executive Director of Elder Law of Michigan, added, “We must recognize that aging issues are truly intergenerational. Today’s economic issues facing working families and individuals will impact

their economic security in later life. State policies and programs must include the long-term goal of promoting economic security across the generations.”

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*Elder Law of Michigan is committed to promoting and protecting the rights, health and economic well-being of older adults by providing information, advocacy, legal advice and professional services. As a mission and values driven non-profit organization, Elder Law of Michigan works at the local, state, regional and national level to craft and deliver responsive programming and to advocate for public policy to meet the changing needs of individuals who are living longer in a complicated world. Elder Law empowers people to solve problems that arise in retirement or after the age of 60. Service delivery hallmarks include programs that explain options, offer unbiased and helpful information, link people to desperately needed money and benefits for basic needs such as food and medical care, and provide the encouragement to take action. Technology with a human touch is a common thread that underscores the organization’s work. Based in Lansing, Michigan, Elder Law has assisted mature adults and their families since 1990. For more information please visit [www.elderlawofmi.org](http://www.elderlawofmi.org) or email Elder Law at [info@elderlawofmi.org](mailto:info@elderlawofmi.org).*

*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, 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)*