



Wider Opportunities for Women



WISCONSIN  
WOMEN'S  
network

**For Immediate Release**

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**Introduction of 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 **Wisconsin Women's Network** 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 Wisconsin Women's Network are addressing on behalf of older Americans through the **Elder Economic Security Initiative™**."*

*Betsy Abramson of the Wisconsin Women's Network said, "We see the effects of poverty on Wisconsin's elders every day. The rising cost of food, gasoline and other goods makes it difficult for them to make ends meet. The Wisconsin Women's Network supports efforts to create a measure that more accurately reflects what elders need to stay in their communities."*

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 gives a realistic, geographically based measure of income adequacy, which can be adjusted to reflect the needs of specific living situations. The Wisconsin Index was introduced by WNN earlier this month.

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. The Index shows that many older

Americans still struggle to make ends meet, even though they are in the technical sense "not poor" because they live above the Federal Poverty Line.

In addition to Wisconsin, the Index has been introduced in four states so far this year. They are California, Illinois, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The response has been significant. Interest was so high in Wisconsin, for instance, that WWN held launch events in three separate cities: Madison, Milwaukee and Green Bay.

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 Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN), founded in 1979, is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals that, advances the status of women and girls in Wisconsin through communication, education, and advocacy. WWN facilitates communication among its members to strengthen their voices, while working together on issues promoting equity and justice for women and their families. For more information, visit [www.wiwomensnetwork.org](http://www.wiwomensnetwork.org).*