

October 14, 2002

Defining 'Poor'

Rachel Unruh,

Policy associate, Women Employed.

Thank you for bringing attention to how we define poverty (Editorial, Sept. 21). The editorial mentions the numerous advantages of the Self-Sufficiency Standard in measuring when families have left poverty. The standard includes the costs of working, such as child care and transportation, and it calculates these costs at the county level to account for geographic variations.

But the standard has another advantage over the federal poverty level. The editorial describes conservative critics, such as the Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector, who attack the poverty level for undercounting non-cash government assistance such as food stamps and Medicaid. The standard models the effects of these work supports on a family budget. The standard should be considered as a more accurate measure of the costs of living and working, and should become the benchmark for evaluating welfare program outcomes.