

Study details basic cost-of-living

For parent of 2, it's \$16 an hour

By Peggy Kreimer, Post staff reporter

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A single mother with two young children has to make at least \$16.03 an hour to support her family in Boone, Kenton or Campbell counties.

In Grant County, she could make it on \$14.84 an hour.

The figures, released Wednesday in a new statewide report on the basic cost of living, show how important state and federal assistance programs are to families struggling to make it on their own.

The report takes a realistic look at the cost of self-sufficiency - living without government subsidies, welfare benefits, food stamps and other charity - said Abby Hughes Holsclaw, policy analyst for Kentucky Youth Advocates, which helped do the study.

It's more than an interesting exercise, Ms. Holsclaw said. She's hoping the figures will convince state legislators, mindful that many working poor don't earn near the living wage the study shows, to keep or improve current assistance programs and change the state's tax laws to add an earned income tax credit for working families.

An earned income credit bill was pre-filed last year by state Rep. Jim Wayne, D-Louisville, and would help families work their way to financial independence, Ms. Holsclaw said.

Debra Miller, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, said the study illustrates the high tax burden on Kentucky working families.

A refundable earned income credit would apply only to earned income.

"It rewards the kind of things we want to reward - working families," she said. "It gives an incentive to work more and it phases out as they

earn more and get to the point where they don't need the help."

Ms. Holsclaw said tax relief is only part of the solution.

"Child care assistance and housing are both high-cost items. Without public support of some of the child care costs, it would be impossible for a single mother to go to work," she said.

The report details realistic costs of basic needs - rent, utilities, child care, food, taxes and transportation. The figures do not include extras like cable television or fast food restaurants.

It describes what it costs for a family to live simply, work hard and pay its bills.

"This validates a lot of things that families across Kentucky already know," Ms. Holsclaw said.

"In these tight budget times, we will use this when we ask the governor and legislature to hold the line on current work supports assisting these families."

She said the report also emphasizes the importance of education and work training to help people improve skills so they can get higher paying jobs.

Susan Sumner, community organizer for Catholic Social Services in Northern Kentucky, said the report is not intended to get businesses to pay higher wages.

It is designed to point out how important it is to provide various support programs to fill gaps that wages may not cover.

The report was prepared by Diana Pearce of the University of Washington with Jennifer Brooks of Wider Opportunities for Woman, in collaboration with Kentucky Youth Advocates, a nonprofit agency with offices in Frankfort and Louisville.

