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Study shows Nevada tough on single parents

LAS VEGAS (AP) - The high cost of child care and the low amount of available subsidies make it difficult for poor single-parent families in Nevada to support themselves, a new study shows.

The "**Self-Sufficiency Standard** for Nevada," released Monday by the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, found the Las Vegas area was one of the more affordable of 16 cities studied - but there is less help available to pay for child care than in other states.

A single parent raising a preschooler and a school-age child needed to make \$15.78 an hour in Las Vegas to make ends meet with no outside help, the study found.

In the Reno area, the hourly rate needed to pay the bills was \$15.23. Only Billings, Mont., was less for such a family, at \$14.68 an hour. San Francisco topped the list at \$25.89.

A sampling of outlying Nevada areas showed the necessary hourly wage was \$15.23 in Douglas County; \$13.71 in Elko County; and \$13.54 in Eureka County.

On a yearly basis, the necessary income for a single parent with two children ranges from a low of \$28,590 in Eureka County to highs of \$32,621 in

the Reno area and \$33,328 in the Las Vegas area. Someone working full time at minimum-wage pay makes just under \$14,000 a year.

"Child care is a big proportion of the budget of families with young children in all the places we look at," said the study's lead author, Diana Pearce of the University of Washington. "In Las Vegas, we found the help available to meet those child-care costs - \$924 a month in Las Vegas - are not as generous."

The state's average hourly wage is \$15.09 an hour, and families beneath the self-sufficient income levels often spend more than half their income on housing and child care, Pearce said.

Subsidized child-care programs in Las Vegas require a working mom spend 25 percent of her income on child care, Pearce said. Most other states require much lower monthly co-payments, the study found.

For example, a mother with two children who works full-time earning \$8.50 an hour is required to pay \$66 a month in Indiana for day care, but \$198 a month in Nevada. Indiana offered the lowest child care co-payments.

If the mother's wages go up to \$12 an hour, she pays \$132 per month in Indiana, but \$554 a month in Nevada.

In addition, only 20 percent of eligible Nevada children get child-care assistance, the study said.

The group, a coalition of 44 labor, professional and human resources organizations, said that the federal poverty standards do not reflect the cost of basic services, from housing and food to transportation and child care.

Its calculations for self-sufficient incomes don't include food stamps, baby-sitting by friends or family or medical care provided by federal or state funds, Pearce said.

The **self-sufficiency standard** is a way to measure the economic health of poor families since 1996 congressional welfare reforms.