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## Study: Two-parent, two-child family in county needs \$30,000 to 'get by'

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A two-parent family with a preschool and a school-age child needs an \$30,609 to "get by" in Hamilton County, according to a study released Tuesday.

The study, called "The **Self-Sufficiency Standard** for Tennessee," measures the minimum income levels needed to live for various family structures in each of Tennessee's 95 counties.

"What the standard does is measure how much it really does cost to meet the needs for living," said Diana Pearce, University of Washington professor of social work and author of the study. "These are pretty bare-bones budgets." Over the last six years, she has applied the **self-sufficiency standard** to 25 other states.

Dr. Pearce said her standard differs from federal poverty measurements because it uses a number of factors, including cost of food, health care, transportation, child care and housing. The federal poverty line for a \$17,000 annually.

The standard does not include "frills," such as entertainment and fast food, Dr. Pearce said. A single adult in Hamilton County

must make \$15,561 to live sufficiently, according to the study. A single parent in the county with a school-age \$22,774 to get by.

Median household income for Hamilton County is \$38,930, according to 2000 U.S. Census figures.

In Bradley County, a single adult must make \$12,643 to get by, and a two-parent family with a preschooler and a school-age child needs to make \$32,520 to live sufficiently.

In Marion County, a single adult must make \$14,807 to get by. A two-parent family with a preschooler and a school-age child must make \$33,051 to get by.

Tom Edd Wilson, president and CEO of the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce, said he was surprised by the numbers released in the study because they are higher than the poverty line numbers he is accustomed to seeing.

"I think that's a little higher than what I've been seeing but is probably very reasonable," Mr. Wilson said. "In many cases the poverty line is too low for families."

Nell Levin, organizer of the Tennessee Alliance for Progress, said the **self-sufficiency standard** can be used for any range of purposes, including by lawmakers who need standards of living for policy changes or for career counselors trying to help poor people get out of poverty.

The alliance sponsored the study along with three other groups.

"It just points to the fact that it cost families a lot more to live than you think," she said. "People need to be earning a lot more."

Milissa Reiersen, spokeswoman from the Tennessee Department of Labor, declined comment on the study. The department is listed as a resource in the study.

The majority of funding for Dr. Pearce's study came from the Ford Foundation, she said.

Dr. Pearce founded and directed the Women and Poverty Project for the Wider Opportunities for Women organization, where she developed the **self-sufficiency standard** in 1996. She teaches in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington.

The study was sponsored by the Tennessee Alliance for Progress, the Tennessee Network for Community and Economic Development, the Tennessee Economic Council on Women and the Tennessee Legislative Black Caucus.

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