

The Miami Herald

WAGES AND WORK

Studies: South Florida a place of fiscal extremes

Two studies by Washington groups highlight the plight of South Florida's working poor and the gulf between them and the rich.

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A study of living costs around the country, released Thursday, found that Miami-Dade residents need to earn at least \$18.49 an hour, or \$39,053 a year, to support a family of one adult and two small children.

Another report, also released Thursday, found that Miami has the country's third-biggest gap between rich and poor residents and Fort Lauderdale the eighth biggest. Washington was found to top the list.

The studies, by different Washington advocacy groups, underscored the problem of low-wage workers and their increasing difficulty in climbing the salary ladder.

In the first study, by Wider Opportunities for Women, Miami-Dade was found to share a pattern with nine other U.S. communities: "A full-time, minimum-wage job in no way covers basic living costs in any part of the country," said Maureen Golga, director of Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project for WOW, a 40-year-old organization that offers job and literacy training for women.

The study, titled *Coming Up Short: A Comparison of Wages and Work Supports in 10 American Communities*, outlines basic budgets for the 10 communities for a single-parent household with two children under age 5. They range from a high of \$59,544 a

year in Boston to a low of \$27,660 in Orleans Parish, La. Miami-Dade ranks fifth.

Essential for low-wage workers to make ends meet are what WOW terms "work supports": subsidized child care, insurance, food stamps, cash assistance, transportation, affordable housing.

The group plans to use the study to urge Washington to devote more resources to ease the plight of the working poor, such as hiking the minimum wage, increasing education and training opportunities and providing more aid to low-wage families in the form of low-cost child care.

The income-equality study, conducted by the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, found the 2000 annual income of Miami's richest top fifth of households to average \$125,934 and the bottom fifth \$4,294. Fort Lauderdale's wealthiest 20 percent earned \$176,053 in 2000, the bottom 20 percent \$7,831.

The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute studies budget and social issues of interest to the District of Columbia.