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**Low-income New Yorkers Hardest Hit by Recession and Continuing Job Crisis
Statement by David R. Jones, President and CEO of the
Community Service Society of New York**

If you thought last week's Census Bureau report on poverty in the United States was dismal – more than 15 percent of all Americans live below the poverty line – figures released today on poverty in New York City are much worse. Low-income New Yorkers have been hard hit by the recession and continuing jobs crisis. The number living below the official federal poverty level (\$22,314 for a family of four) climbed to more than 1.6 million.

In 2010, the poverty rate in our city rose to 20.1 percent, a 1.4 percentage point jump over the 2009 rate of 18.7 percent. That far exceeds the national poverty rate of 15.1 percent. The yearly increase in poverty was also substantially higher for New York City than for the nation, up 1.4 percentage points, compared to a rise of .8 percentage point for the country.

The picture is particularly dire for some New Yorkers. Poverty remained high for Latinos in the city, at 27.9 percent, an insignificant change from 28.1 percent the previous year, and climbed for blacks from 20.8 percent in 2009 to 23 percent in 2010. New Yorkers who have not finished high school had a poverty rate of 30.8 percent compared to 18.7 percent for those with a diploma or GED, and 7 percent for college graduates. But single mothers experienced by far the highest levels of poverty; 41.1 percent in 2010, up from 38.8 percent in 2009.

Our annual survey of New Yorkers, [The Unheard Third 2010](#) reveals what these abstract statistics mean in the daily lives of low-income working mothers: four out of 10 had their work hours or wages go down; over one-third fell behind in their rent; and 57 percent say they worry all or most of the time that their earnings will not be enough to pay the bills. What's more, they have virtually no savings to fall back on in event of an emergency. Many low-income New Yorkers are just one illness, one lost paycheck, or one emergency away from destitution – even those working full-time.

Before welfare reform, public assistance insulated low-income single moms from some of the harshest effects of the business cycles. But now, as so many have moved into low-wage work, contractions in jobs push them rapidly into poverty. The dramatic jump in deep poverty (50 percent of the federal poverty level) from 8.4 percent in 2009 to 9.2 percent in 2010 probably reflects the new reality of single working mothers losing their jobs, but no longer shielded from deep poverty by public assistance. While the numbers receiving food stamps and Medicaid has risen in New York City, family assistance (TANF) rolls have not increased since the recession.

In light of the hardships faced by low-income New Yorkers, our elected officials should be pressing Congress to act on the President's jobs initiative. Closer to home we must aggressively initiate job creation efforts at the state and local level. This is the time to take advantage of low interest rates to build and repair our infrastructure. With a 30 percent poverty rate for high school dropouts, it's time to expand GED preparation programs and other services that connect people to education, training and decent jobs. There's an old saying: every crisis presents an opportunity. This is our opportunity to focus on creating on-ramps to the career highway for those who have been hardest hit by the prolonged job crunch. In doing so, borrowing from the words of Economist and Columnist Paul Krugman, we can avoid seeing the unemployed among us become the un-employable and permanently left behind.

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For more than 165 years, the [Community Service Society of New York](#) has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation's largest city.