

# RECOGNIZING JANUARY AS POVERTY IN AMERICA AWARENESS MONTH

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(House of Representatives - February 04, 2009)

Statement of Representative Danny K. Davis

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize this past January as Poverty in America Awareness Month and to thank the young intern in my office, Ms. Foster, for developing this very excellent statement.

Mr. Speaker, Nelson Mandela once proclaimed, ``Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right: the right to dignity and a decent life."

During this season of economic crisis, we policymakers have an obligation to promote justice and to protect our citizens who are struggling. Poverty is a reality for far too many people in Chicago, Illinois, and throughout the Nation.

In the United States, 36 percent of our Nation is considered low income, with 17 percent living in poverty. In Illinois, 33 percent of the population is low income, with about 15 percent living in poverty

In 2007, 21 percent of Chicagoans lived in poverty, with another 21 percent teetering on its edge.

The current economic crisis is exacerbating these conditions. The unemployment rate in Illinois in the Nation is over 7 percent. Hundreds of thousands of jobs in Illinois have been lost in recent months. There are more than 500,000 foreclosures, 50,000 foreclosures in Cook County alone.

And due to an almost \$4 billion State budget gap, programs vital to assisting the public, such as mental health centers, are facing funding reductions in the range of millions of dollars.

Poverty is most harmful to children, especially young

children. Children in poverty are more likely to experience child abuse or neglect. Families in poverty often cannot provide appropriate resources for healthy child development. Children's physical health and cognitive abilities can be compromised. When compared with wealthier children, poor children have poorer outcomes in the areas of school achievement, emotional control, and behavior.

Living in poverty affects the quality of education, health care, and living conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a part of a Congress that has crafted an economic recovery package that provides critical aid to families experiencing poverty. The substantial increases in the food stamp program will directly help families make ends meet. The provisions providing health care for those who lost their jobs during this crisis will help many in Chicago and throughout the Nation.

The one-time payment for families who rely on supplemental security income for the poor, elderly, and individuals with disabilities will provide a lifeline for families that are barely making it. The increases in the child tax credit will help families stand on their own feet.

In addition to these provisions of the American Recovery Bill that will help alleviate the effects of poverty, I look forward to moving towards a system of universal health coverage during this Congress to help all Americans have access to health care. I also anticipate that Congress will consider ways in which to improve public assistance programs, such as simplifying enrollment procedures for Medicaid and other safety net programs.

During this economic downturn, it is critical that we continue to support safety net programs to assure that those in need are assisted. The role of the Federal Government is especially necessary given that many State governments are cutting vital support programs to comply with State balanced-budget requirements.

And Mr. Speaker, as Mr. Mandela recognized, we have a responsibility to work to minimize the harm of poverty. Therefore, I join with my colleagues in recognizing January as Poverty in America Awareness Month and promise to continue to promote programs--no matter what else it is that I do--that are designed to help eliminate and reduce poverty in America.