



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1905

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Page 1/1

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Striving to Live Above the Poverty Line

The recently released federal poverty guidelines demonstrate what the government considers to be poor.

After the release of the Ohio state budget, focus was on cuts in government programs to help the poor. The federal poverty guidelines affect who is eligible for different types of public benefits, including Medicaid, the national school lunch program, the energy assistance program, subsidized child care and housing.

The guidelines provide that a family of three could make \$16,090 a year. At the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour, a wage last adjusted in 1997, an individual would have to work 60 hours per week, every week of the year just to reach the poverty line. A worker who works 40 hours a week, would have to receive a wage of \$7.74 an hour to reach it. US Department of Labor statistics show many Ohio jobs pay substantially less.

Participants in the Ohio Works First program (welfare-to-work) are required to work 30 hours per week and are given \$373 per month for a family of three. This comes out to around \$2.87 per hour, which is only 37% of the poverty level.

Many politicians and economists have agreed that the federal poverty standard describes a “bare bone” minimal standard of living. A humane standard of living needs to have much higher standards. For example, the wage needed to successfully rent an average 2-bedroom apartment in Ohio is \$12.08 per hour, well above the minimum wage.

Many Ohio families, despite working full time jobs, still fall below the federal poverty level. For these families, the medical, child care and energy assistance programs that have been targeted for cuts in the budget provide them essential supports which increase their ability to maintain employment.

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland provides high-quality free legal assistance to low income clients in five Northeast Ohio counties. Eligibility for free legal services is based upon current federal poverty income guidelines and an asset limit.

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