



## RESOLUTION TO CUT POVERTY

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### INTRODUCTION

California is a state of opportunity, drawing residents from all over the world with the hope of a better life. However, increases in hunger, illness, violence, homelessness, unemployment and illiteracy in California are barriers to the dreams of better lives. Each of these issues is directly related to the overall increase in poverty and each is made worse by the shredded safety net in our state. It is no longer enough to try to address each symptom of poverty separately and stabilize a person for a day, only to have the same issues recur—hunger, lack of access to affordable healthcare, homelessness and inadequate housing, unequal and inadequate education, and lack of income sufficient to make ends meet. We need to address the causes of poverty and work together to break the cycle of poverty for the future.

Poverty represents a moral crisis that divides our communities and threatens the common good. But poverty can be mitigated, reduced, and even prevented by taking concerted action in five key areas: food, housing, healthcare, education, and income development. Guided by the principles of mercy and justice, a commitment to the common good, and a call to respond first to those most in need, Step Up California, a coalition of organizations and individuals, has launched a campaign to cut poverty in California.<sup>1</sup> Our ultimate goal is to eliminate poverty. At the same time, we recognize that this will take time and a strong commitment to take the steps necessary to get closer to the goal each year.

This Resolution on Poverty is an invitation to “step up” and join the campaign to cut poverty in California – Step Up California!

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**WHEREAS**, the federal poverty rate in California is 12.4 percent and California’s poverty rate is anticipated to reach 17.7 percent when the peak impact of the 2008 economic crisis is felt;<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Step Up California, the campaign to cut poverty, is an initiative of Catholic Charities of California.

<sup>2</sup> NCPA, 2006

it takes families in California two to three times the federal poverty rate to make ends meet in California;<sup>3</sup>

**WHEREAS**, nearly a million California seniors (864,000) are unable to pay for basic needs—food, transportation, medical care, and housing;<sup>4</sup> and approximately 22 percent of California's children are poor and the impact of poverty on young children is significant and long-lasting;<sup>5</sup>

**WHEREAS**, families where adults lack a high school diploma have a poverty rate of 41 percent; and single-mother families have a poverty rate of 37 percent;

**WHEREAS**, the poor are two to five times more likely to suffer from a mental disorder than any other group and more likely to encounter significant barriers to obtaining treatment;<sup>6</sup>

**WHEREAS**, California's unemployment rate of 11.5 percent is the fourth highest in the nation, an increase of 47 percent since January 2008.<sup>7</sup> Drought conditions have caused unemployment rates to exceed 40 percent in some Central Valley communities;<sup>8</sup>

**WHEREAS**, one in four homeless Americans lives in California;<sup>9</sup> and the housing crisis significantly impacts California: of the top ten metropolitan areas for foreclosures in the United States, four were in California, as of August 2007;<sup>10</sup> nearly 250 residential developments with a combined total of 9,389 houses and condominiums and an estimated worth of \$3.5 billion are now on hold;

**WHEREAS**, 2009 is the third consecutive year of drought in California, resulting in record unemployment rates (over 40 percent in some communities) and food shortages;<sup>11</sup> historically low levels of water storage at a time of heightened fire danger; and adverse impacts on the stability of families, businesses, communities, and ecosystems;

**WHEREAS**, the demand for basic safety net services from public and non-profit service providers is dramatically increasing; while historic cuts in state funding and a deteriorating economy are reducing and eliminating both public and private financial resources for these services;<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Insight Center for Community Economic Development, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, et al., 2009

<sup>5</sup> Palmer, Song, Lu, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Bourdon, Rae, Narrow, Manderschild, & Regier, 1994; Regier et al., 1993; McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990; as cited in APA, 2000

<sup>7</sup> CWDA / CSAC, 2009

<sup>8</sup> California OES, 2009

<sup>9</sup> NAEH, 2009

<sup>10</sup> CNNMoney, 2009

<sup>11</sup> California OES, 2009

<sup>12</sup> The state saw significant increases in assistance levels for the Food Stamp program (15.3 percent), CalWorks (5.9 percent), Homeless Assistance (22.2 percent), General Assistance (17.3 percent), and Medi-Cal (4.6 percent); while direct budget cuts to human service programs over the last eight years total \$432.9 million. (Flaming, Burns, & Matsunaga, 2009).

**WHEREAS**, the most vulnerable members of our communities who are poor—including the severely disabled, the sick, the elderly, the seriously mentally ill, and the dying—may always need assistance from others to survive, including public and non-profit providers; and recent state budget cuts have significantly reduced direct assistance and program funding for these individuals who have no hope of providing for themselves;

**WHEREAS**, California has the 8th largest economy in the world and the largest population of any state and has been at the forefront of technological and cultural innovation throughout its history, and for the good of our great state, Californians must step up and apply this innovative spirit to reducing poverty;

**WHEREAS**, there are multiple ways that individuals, organizations, corporations, and governments can step up to cut poverty, regardless of political and religious affiliation, race, gender, sexual preference and economic status;

**THEREFORE**, Be it resolved that **Step Up California** is a coalition dedicated to working together to reduce poverty in California by changing policies that affect the poor.

As a coalition we agree to:

1. **Measure** poverty using the California Family Economic Self Sufficiency Standard<sup>13</sup>;
2. **Advocate** for policies to prevent, mitigate and reduce poverty affecting the most vulnerable members of our communities—those who cannot care for themselves or their families, whether due to illness, disability, age, unemployment, or other circumstances.
3. **Call Upon** all Californians to step up and more actively serve those who are poor by donating money and volunteering time to organizations that provide direct services to those in need;
4. **Educate** all Californians about the challenges faced by the poor and the work of community-based organizations statewide to help those in poverty;
5. **Collaborate** with individuals, organizations, corporations and public entities throughout California to alleviate poverty in our state; and
6. Work to **ensure** that all Californians have access to: adequate food and water to nourish their bodies; affordable quality health care and treatments necessary for a decent quality of life; safe decent affordable housing; quality affordable education from early childhood to career; and the opportunity to earn an income that adequately provides for themselves and their families.

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<sup>13</sup> Detailed Self-Sufficiency Standard figures available at: <http://www.insightccd.org/index.php?page=ca-sss>

## To Join Step Up California: The Campaign to Cut Poverty in California

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