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## **CSS Survey Reveals Sentiments of Low-Income New Yorkers**

### **Across Income, Race and Political Affiliation**

### **Poverty Survey Is Released Early as a Call to Presidential Candidates & NY Delegation During the National Conventions**

**New York, NY, August 27, 2008** -- For the seventh consecutive year, the Community Service Society of New York (CSS) has issued its annual survey of low-income New Yorkers, "[The Unheard Third](#)" (PDF). The 2008 survey, subtitled, "**Economic Insecurity and Federal Priorities,**" is a call to the presidential candidates during the national conventions and a call to New York's federal, state and local elected officials to create a policy agenda that includes the concerns of low-income New Yorkers. The Unheard Third gauges their sentiments on a variety of public policy interventions. It is the only annual survey of its kind that measures the thoughts of this population in a major American city. One-third of New York City's voting age citizens live in low-income households.

"The Unheard Third survey captures the everyday struggles of low and moderate income New Yorkers. More than 6 in 10 New Yorkers – across all income bands – say life is harder now than it was five years ago. The majority of these New Yorkers say life has gotten harder in the last year or two," said David R. Jones, president and CEO of CSS. Jones added that "while the survey is conducted in New York, the sentiments of New Yorkers are echoed in urban centers across the nation, which is why the next president and New York's elected delegation must develop a national policy agenda that is reflective of the nation's and certainly New York's low-income people."

Two populations of low-income residents were interviewed for the survey – 529 "poor" respondents (below 100% of poverty, or less than \$17,600 a year for a family of three) and 486 "near poor" respondents (between 100% and 200% of poverty, or between \$17,600 and \$35,200 a year for a family of three). The survey also includes two additional populations of New Yorkers – 203 "middle-income" respondents – earning between 200% and 400% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$35,000 to \$70,000) and 305 "high income" respondents who earn above 400% of the federal poverty level (more than approximately \$70,000).

The Unheard Third survey provides a window into the issues most challenging to low-income New Yorkers; namely, jobs and the economy, which top the federal policy agenda. The survey also revealed that work does not provide economic or food security for low-income New Yorkers.

The survey revealed that jobs and the economy top the federal policy agenda and will most influence New Yorkers' voting decisions when they go to the polls this November. The war in Iraq, which was the top response in 2007, is the second most important voting issues this year.

The economy is also the most important domestic issue for a candidate to address leading up to the presidential election for New Yorkers across incomes and political affiliations. Affordable health insurance for everyone is the second highest domestic priority. According to the survey, New Yorkers strongly support federal proposals in the following areas: providing affordable health insurance for everyone, raising the minimum wage to \$9.50 hourly by 2011, expanding unemployment benefits to part-time workers, and guaranteeing child care assistance for low-income families.

The economy continues to place additional hardships on low-income people. New Yorkers across all income bands are worried about the economy. The economic downturn has caused low-income New Yorkers to worry most about keeping up with housing costs or losing their home, rising gas and home heating prices, and losing their job. Half of poor residents and more than 4 in 10 near-poor residents worry all or most of the time that their family income will not be enough to meet expenses and bills. The survey also revealed that more than half of low-income New Yorkers do not feel secure about meeting their future, family, health and retirement needs, respectively.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that work does not provide economic security for low-income New Yorkers, and food insecurity is very high. Low-income New Yorkers reported steady work history, but many do not receive benefits, including health care and prescription drug coverage. Most low-income part-time workers would like to work more hours. The vast majority of low-income respondents faced at least one economic, food, health, or housing hardships over the last year. Nearly half of middle income respondents also faced at least one hardship – including approximately 1 in 5 who could not fill a prescription or went without or postponed medical care. When asked how they spent their tax refunds or tax returns, many low-income New Yorkers indicated they used this money to meet basic needs, such as food. Middle-income New Yorkers were more likely to use their refunds/rebates to pay off debt, and high income respondents were most likely to put tax refunds/rebates into their savings.

Jones added, "Many New Yorkers are focused on basic survival needs and avoiding financial foreclosure. Low-income New Yorkers continue to suffer in relative silence." Jones warned, "We are destined for failure if we do not begin to listen to New York's Unheard Third and to low-income Americans across the nation."

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*"The Unheard Third," conducted by CSS and fielded by the national polling firm Lake Research Partners, is a unique snapshot of the policy preferences and experiences of low-income New Yorkers. The survey is partially funded through the generous support of the Independence Community Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, The New York Community Trust, and The Rockefeller Foundation. CSS has used the survey to inform and guide its research, direct service programs, and policy*

*recommendations. It has served to narrow the focus of the agency's agenda on the working poor and reinforce its belief that public policy aimed at this population must, in part, be guided by the life experiences and ideas of New Yorkers living in poverty.*

Learn more about this year's survey at [http://www.cssny.org/pdfs/2008\\_Unheard\\_Third.pdf](http://www.cssny.org/pdfs/2008_Unheard_Third.pdf).

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The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for 160 years and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation's largest city.

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