

Hi. My name is Amy Jo Hutchison. I'm a single mom of two who's lived in WV all my life. I'm also a community organizer for WV Healthy Kids and Families/Our Future WV, where I organize and advocate for poor and marginalized folks. Today, I'm here to help you better understand poverty, because poverty is my lived experience, and to acknowledge the biased beliefs that poor people are lazy and that poverty is their fault, but how do I make you understand things like working full-time for \$10/hr is only \$19,000 a year even though it's well above the federal minimum wage of \$7.25?

I want to tell you about a single mom I met who was working at a gas station. She was promoted to manager and within 30 days had to report her new income to DHHR. Within 60 days, her rent jumped from \$475-\$950 a month. She lost her SNAP benefits, and her family's health insurance was gone. So she did what poor people are forced to do all the time: she resigned her promotion and went back to working part-time just so she and her family could survive.

Another single mom encouraged her kids to get jobs. For her DHHR review, she had to claim their income as well. She lost her SNAP benefits and insurance, so she weaned herself off of her blood pressure meds because she, working full-time at a bank and part-time at a shop on the weekends, couldn't afford to buy them. Eventually, the girls quit their jobs because their part-time fast food income was killing their mom.

See, the thing is, children aren't going to escape poverty as long as they're relying on a Head of Household who is poor. Poverty rolls off the back of parents and right onto the shoulders of our kids despite how hard we try. I can tell you about food insecurity and the nights I went to bed hungry so my kids could have seconds- while I was employed as a Head Start teacher. I can tell you about being above the poverty line and nursing your gallbladder with essential oils and prayer, about chewing on cloves and eating ibuprofen like TicTacs for toothaches because you don't have health insurance and can't afford a dentist.

I have 2 jobs and a Bachelor's Degree and struggle to make ends meet. The Federal Poverty Guidelines say that I'm not poor, but I cashed in a jar full of change the other day so my daughter could attend a music competition with her school band. I can't go grocery shopping without a calculator. I had to decide which bills to not pay so I could make this trip. Believe me, I've pulled myself up by the bootstraps so many times that I've ripped the damn things off!

The current poverty guidelines are ridiculously out of touch. The poverty line for a family of 3 is \$21,720. Where I live, because of the oil and gas boom, a 3 bdrm home rents for \$1200 a month, so if I made \$22,000, which could disqualify me from assistance, I would have \$8000/yr left to raise 2 kids on. And yet the poverty guidelines wouldn't classify me as poor.

I Googled "Congressman's salary" the other day, and, according to Senate.gov, the salary for senators, representatives, and delegates is \$174,000 a year." A year of work for you is the equivalent of nearly 4 years of work for me, and I'm about \$24,000 above Federal Poverty Guidelines of "poor." It would take 9 people working full-time for a year at \$10/hr. to match your salary.

I also read that "Each Senator is authorized \$40,000 for state office furniture and furnishings and this amount is increased each year to reflect inflation." That \$40,000 a year for furniture is \$360 MORE than the Federal Poverty Guidelines for a family of seven. And yet here I am, begging you on behalf of the 15 MILLION children living in poverty across the U.S., on behalf of 1 in 3 kids under the age of 5 and the nearly 100,000 kids living in poverty in WV, to not change anything about the Federal Poverty Guidelines until you make them relevant and reflect what poverty really looks like today. You have a \$40,000 furniture allotment... WV has a median income of \$43,000 and some change.

People are working full-time and are hungry...kids are about to be kicked off of the free and reduced lunch roles...62% of WV SNAP recipients are families with children...children who can't get jobs because their parents will die without health insurance. People are working full-time for very little money. They're not poor enough to receive help and don't make enough to get by.

They're working while they're rationing insulin and skipping meds because they can't afford food and health care. Shame on you. Shame on you and shame on me. And shame on every one of us for not rattling the windows with cries of outrage at a government that thinks its offices are worthy of \$40,000 a year but families and children aren't!

I'm not asking you to apologize for your privilege, but I am asking you to see past it. There are 46 million Americans living in poverty, doing the best they know how with what they have, and we, in defense of children and families, cannot accept anything less from our government. Thank you.