

Alexandria, MN
ECHO PRESS
Editorial - Job gap shows need to address poverty issues
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We're glad that lawmakers are taking a closer look into doing something for families that are struggling to make ends meet.

While these families may not be considered "poverty cases" under state and federal guidelines, more needs to be done to stop them – and other cash-strapped Minnesotans – from falling into the poverty pit.

The Commission to End Poverty by 2020 will be in Alexandria on Friday, November 30. A community forum will be conducted from 1 to 3 p.m. at St. Mary's Catholic Church.

The commission consists of 18 Minnesota state legislators who equally represent both the DFL and Republican parties. It will make recommendations to the full Legislature by December 15, 2008 on how to end poverty by 2020.

One of the key issues they should be addressing is job pay. The state has to come up with a way of creating better paying jobs and more of them, especially in Greater Minnesota.

A new Minnesota Job Vacancy Survey shows that over the last year, the number of job openings in Greater Minnesota fell by 7 percent. In Greater Minnesota, there now are 65,000 job seekers competing for only 25,000 unfilled jobs.

The median (50th percentile) wage for all Greater Minnesota job openings is \$9 per hour. Research shows that in a Greater Minnesota family of four with both parents working, each worker must earn at least \$10.58 per hour to meet basic needs.

Other major findings for Greater Minnesota include:

- Of the 15 occupations with the most job openings, only two offer median wages of more than \$10 per hour.
- Forty percent of all job openings are part-time; the median wage for these openings is \$7 per hour.
- More than seven out of 10 job openings (73 percent) require no education or training beyond high school. For these openings, the median wage is \$8.51 per hour.
- Only 13 percent of openings require a four-year college degree.
- Job openings that require a four-year degree pay a much higher median wage (about \$20 per hour) than those that require no education or training beyond high school. Unfortunately, a job opening in Greater Minnesota is five times more likely to require no education or training beyond high school than to require a four-year degree, according to state job experts.

People can talk statistics like this until they are blue in the face but the message really hits home when it comes directly from the people who are experiencing it.

That's why residents should speak up at Friday's forum. Putting a face and a voice to a problem can go a long way in solving it.