

Statement of Congresswoman Shelley Berkley
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support
Hearing Examining the Measuring American Poverty Act
July 17, 2008

Thank you Mr. Chairman:

Congress oversees many programs that seek to aid our poorest citizens and give them a hand up to better their situation. If we hope to efficiently and effectively target limited resources it is vital that we have poverty measures that accurately reflect where poverty exists and who is experiencing it. The system used currently to determine poverty for the purposes of allocating federal aid such as Food Stamps, S-CHIP, Medicaid and low or no cost school meals has serious shortcomings. Even under this flawed system, nearly 10% of people in Nevada are living below the poverty line.

The rapid growth in Southern Nevada over the last several years has led to an increase in the cost of living in the area. Las Vegas has also experienced a critical lack of affordable housing, forcing people to live farther and farther from where they work and to spend more and more on commuting. Factors such as these are not adequately addressed in the current poverty measures.

I can tell you that in Las Vegas you would need to earn much more than \$21,200—the 2008 Federal Poverty Guideline for a family of four—to adequately house, provide transportation, feed, and clothe your family, let alone afford health care and other necessities.

The draft legislation we are discussing today, based on the recommendations of the 1995 panel, would be a positive step in creating a measure that accurately gauges who needs assistance and how effective the policies of Congress are in battling poverty.

I thank the witnesses for their expert testimony and I hope that Congress will be able to advance this or similar legislation to improve the current, obsolete measure.