Poverty grows in Washington DC suburbs

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The Washington DC area, including 7 of the 10 wealthiest counties in the United States, has witnessed a growth of poverty in the wake of the 2008 financial disaster. That poverty has deepened in suburbs long associated with claims of being "recession-proof" near the nation's capital bears special significance.

Areas in Northern Virginia, including Fairfax, Loudoun, Arlington and Prince William counties, saw increases in the number of people considered to be poor. Loudoun County, an area possessing a median household income level of nearly $120,000, has also seen a 5 percent rise in family homelessness in the past year.

A Brookings Institution report entitled "Strained Suburbs" explained that in 1999, levels of poverty remained nearly the same in the inner city, and in outer areas surrounding cities. By 2008, suburban areas were reported to have outstripped the inner cities in numbers of poor citizens by nearly 1.5 million. The report also states that since the 2007-08 economic recession, suburban nonprofit providers to the poor have seen a 73 percent growth in need for their services, often from individuals not previously receiving any assistance.

The report noted that suburban providers oftentimes had to stretch their services across much larger distances than their urban counterparts, making access for individuals living in certain regions in the outlying areas more difficult. As of 2010, 47 percent of all suburban nonprofits had reported a loss of a key source of funding during the economic downturn, with 30 percent announcing layoffs to staff members due to loss of grants and other key items.

A recent *Washington Post* article highlights the case of Dulce Arroyo. Arroyo stated that in her former position as a certified medical assistant in Fairfax County she could barely make ends meet. "I wonder why I'm so poor," she said, adding "I work as hard as anybody."

Fairfax County demographer Annie Cahill stated that "we still think of [poverty] being in the inner city. The reality is, poverty in the suburbs is where the growth is."

"Well I know everybody brags about Fairfax being one of the richest counties to live in," said Diana Lutchey, a mother of 3 living in Alexandria, "but what people don't understand is it's one of the most expensive, too. It's very hard to afford to live here."

"This might be a county that might have more opportunity or be more wealthy, but if that's the case, why am I still homeless?", Jeffrey Tibbs, a resident at the Bailey's Crossroads Community Shelter in Falls Church, Virginia, said to the *Post*.

Though the regional poverty average of 8.3 percent remains low in comparison to the 15 percent national average, the *Post* cited reports which had shown that poverty levels in the outlying suburbs to be on the incline. According to the paper, cases of people receiving federally-funded food stamps have more than doubled in the period since 2007 in Prince William County alone.

On the issue of increasing household incomes and home sales existing next to rising levels of poverty, Ellen Grunewald of the Loudoun County Department of Family Services explained, "typically people at the lower end [of the income spectrum] do not benefit from that kind of growth," adding, "People of moderate income […] just don't have enough income [to pay] these kinds of rents, or pay for child care."

The District of Columbia and surrounding areas, associated with the growth of the U.S. defense industry and its related private government contractors has been home to some of the most vast instances of social inequality in the nation. The top 5 percent in the DC area, possessing nearly $500,000 yearly incomes, dwarf their counterparts in other major cities in the U.S.

Likewise, the District of Columbia itself has been a

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significant rise in impoverishment in the past years, even as the levels of median income and employment have risen. A report by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI), drawing from the recently published U.S. Census, shows that since 2007 levels of poverty increased from 16 percent to 19 percent in the District, totaling 109,000 people, while at the same time median income rose from $58,700 to $63,100, or 8 percent. The report explained this was due to the fact that "as the District begins to grow and recover […] it is doing so in a way that is leaving many groups of residents behind."

The report noted that the number of citizens living in "deep" poverty, or those found to be living at *half* the official poverty line of $23,021 for a 4-person family, grew by 21 percent. This means that 10 percent of the District's population, or roughly 60,000 people, live in deep poverty. Nearly 30 percent of children in the District of Columbia are registered as living in poverty, stated the report.

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