

# ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 131

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY

### 221st LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 2, 2024

**Sponsored by:**

**Assemblywoman SHANIQUE SPEIGHT**

**District 29 (Essex and Hudson)**

**Assemblywoman SHAVONDA E. SUMTER**

**District 35 (Bergen and Passaic)**

**Assemblywoman CARMEN THERESA MORALES**

**District 34 (Essex)**

**SYNOPSIS**

Urges federal government to raise federal poverty line for public assistance programs.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 5/10/2024)

AR131 SPEIGHT, SUMTER

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1 AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION urging the federal government to raise  
2 the federal poverty line for public assistance programs.

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4 WHEREAS, The federal poverty line is an inaccurate measurement of  
5 poverty, preventing many poor Americans from accessing public  
6 assistance programs such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition  
7 Program, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, among  
8 others; and

9 WHEREAS, The current federal poverty line was developed in the  
10 1960s and was based on a household's ability to purchase basic  
11 foodstuffs alone; and

12 WHEREAS, Aside from adjusting for inflation, this calculation has not  
13 changed since its inception; and

14 WHEREAS, Over the past sixty years, housing, transportation, child  
15 care, and medical costs-all of which are not included in the federal  
16 government's poverty calculation-have risen exponentially; and

17 WHEREAS, As a result, nearly 53 million households cannot afford  
18 basic necessities such as food, housing, and health care, but only  
19 37.9 million are officially recorded as living in poverty as of 2022;  
20 and

21 WHEREAS, Because the federal government uses the poverty threshold  
22 to determine eligibility for public assistance programs, any  
23 individual or household not captured by the official poverty  
24 calculation is unable to access life-saving social welfare; and

25 WHEREAS, Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rampant rate  
26 of inflation have further compounded the cost-of-living crisis in  
27 America, increasing the financial burden on many poor Americans  
28 who can neither afford basic necessities nor access public  
29 assistance; and

30 WHEREAS, In addition, the recent trend toward raising the minimum  
31 wage across the country has had unintended consequences for low-  
32 wage earners who have lost access to public assistance programs in  
33 exchange for a marginal, and often insufficient, increase in pay,  
34 resulting in a benefits cliff; and

35 WHEREAS, This benefits cliff creates a disincentive to work, as low-  
36 wage earners often choose to be unemployed or work less rather  
37 than lose access to crucial public assistance programs; and

38 WHEREAS, By raising the federal poverty line, the federal government  
39 can more accurately report the number of impoverished Americans  
40 and, therefore, expand access to public assistance programs for all  
41 individuals and households who need it; now, therefore,

42

43 BE IT RESOLVED by the General Assembly of the State of New  
44 Jersey:

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46 1. This House urges the federal government to raise the federal  
47 poverty line for public assistance programs.

1       2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,  
2 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the  
3 President of the United States, the Speaker and Minority Leader of  
4 the House of Representatives, the Majority and Minority Leaders of  
5 the United States Senate, and every member of Congress elected  
6 from this State.

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STATEMENT

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11       This resolution urges the federal government to raise the federal  
12 poverty line for public assistance programs. The current federal  
13 poverty line was developed in the 1960s and was based on a  
14 household's ability to afford basic foodstuffs alone; it did not  
15 account for other living expenses such as housing, transportation,  
16 child care, and health care, which have all risen exponentially in  
17 price over the past sixty years. The federal government has not  
18 changed the original calculation for the poverty line since its  
19 inception, aside from adjusting for inflation. Consequently, nearly  
20 53 million households cannot afford basic necessities such as food,  
21 housing, and health care, but only 37.9 million are officially  
22 recorded as living in poverty, as of 2022.

23       The poverty threshold is used to determine eligibility for public  
24 assistance programs. As a result, the individuals and households  
25 who do not earn enough money to support their basic needs but do  
26 not meet the stringent limits of the current federal poverty line are  
27 without access to public assistance. Since 2020, the COVID-19  
28 pandemic and the rampant rate of inflation have only worsened the  
29 cost-of-living crisis, increasing the financial burden on many poor  
30 Americans who cannot access social welfare. In addition, recent  
31 policies to raise the minimum wage across the country have had  
32 unintended consequences for low-wage earners who have lost  
33 access to public assistance in exchange for a marginal, and often  
34 insufficient, increase in pay, resulting in a benefits cliff. By raising  
35 the federal poverty line, the federal government can more  
36 accurately report the number of impoverished Americans and,  
37 therefore, expand access to public assistance programs for the  
38 individuals and households who need it.