

**SENATE CONCURRENT
RESOLUTION No. 93**

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

221st LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 22, 2024

Sponsored by:
Senator M. TERESA RUIZ
District 29 (Essex and Hudson)

SYNOPSIS

Urges President and Congress to enact "Poverty Line Act of 2023."

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



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1 **A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION** urging the President and Congress of
2 the United States to enact the “Poverty Line Act of 2023.”
3
4 **WHEREAS**, The federal poverty guidelines, more commonly known as
5 the federal poverty level, are a measure of income issued annually
6 by the United States Department of Health and Human Services
7 which are used to determine an individual’s or household’s
8 eligibility for certain State and federal programs and benefits; and
9 **WHEREAS**, The current method for calculating these guidelines was
10 established in the 1960s and is tied a household’s food budget from
11 that decade, adjusted for inflation; and
12 **WHEREAS**, For most modern American households, however, the cost
13 of food has decreased as a share of expenses relative to other costs
14 like housing, utilities, childcare, transportation, and healthcare; and
15 **WHEREAS**, Despite the federal poverty level’s benefit of providing a
16 nationally recognized income threshold for determining who is
17 poor, its shortcomings are well documented as it is not based on the
18 current cost of basic household necessities and, except for Alaska
19 and Hawaii, it is not adjusted to reflect cost of living differences
20 across the United States; and
21 **WHEREAS**, As a result, millions of struggling families across the
22 country make too little to afford their basic needs, yet because the
23 federal poverty line is so low, they are not eligible for safety net
24 benefits; and
25 **WHEREAS**, According to the 2023 United for ALICE (Asset Limited,
26 Income Constrained, Emloyed) report, 11 percent of households in
27 New Jersey in 2021, or 368,639, lived in poverty according to the
28 federal guidelines; however, another 26 percent of households, or
29 923,791, were above the federal poverty level but did not earn
30 enough to afford the basics necessities in the communities in which
31 they lived; and
32 **WHEREAS**, In December of 2023, Congressman Kevin Mullin of
33 California introduced the “Poverty Line Act of 2023,” with the
34 support of New Jersey Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman
35 and others, which proposes to update the way the federal
36 government calculates the federal poverty line by accounting for real
37 costs and adjusting for regional differences; and
38 **WHEREAS**, These changes to the federal poverty level calculation
39 would make millions more families across the nation eligible for
40 safety net programs, including Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition
41 Assistance Program, and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance
42 Program, which provide critical support to people during times of
43 economic hardship; and
44 **WHEREAS**, Notably, the bill would also ensure that the new
45 methodology is reviewed at least once every four years to determine
46 whether it is still reflective of what households need to meet their
47 basic needs and to identify additional changes needed in the future;
48 and

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1 **WHEREAS**, The “Poverty Line Act of 2023” has been endorsed by
2 more than 40 organizations, including Children’s Defense Fund,
3 Feeding America, Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, and
4 United Way Worldwide; and

5 **WHEREAS**, The enactment of the “Poverty Line Act of 2023” would
6 provide that the determination of poverty in New Jersey and the
7 United States reflects the current level of financial distress
8 experienced by millions of American families, ensuring greater
9 access to the vital government benefits that provide the necessary
10 short- and long-term support and stability to allow for economic
11 mobility; now, therefore,

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13 **BE IT RESOLVED** by the Senate of the State of New Jersey (the
14 *General Assembly concurring*):

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16 1. The President of the United States and Congress are urged to
17 enact the “Poverty Line Act of 2023” to provide that the
18 determination of poverty in New Jersey and the United States
19 reflects the current level of financial distress experienced by
20 millions of American families, ensuring greater access to the vital
21 government benefits that provide the necessary short- and long-term
22 support and stability to allow for economic mobility.

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24 2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,
25 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly or the
26 Secretary of the Senate to the President of the United States and
27 every member of the New Jersey Congressional delegation.

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STATEMENT

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32 This resolution urges the President and Congress to enact the
33 “Poverty Line Act of 2023,” which would update the way the federal
34 government calculates the federal poverty guidelines by accounting
35 for real costs and adjusting for regional differences. The federal
36 poverty guidelines, more commonly known as the federal poverty
37 level, are a measure of income issued annually by the United States
38 Department of Health and Human Services which are used to
39 determine an individual’s or household’s eligibility for certain State
40 and federal programs and benefits. Despite the federal poverty
41 level’s benefit of providing a nationally recognized income
42 threshold for determining who is poor, its shortcomings are well
43 documented as it is not based on the current cost of basic household
44 necessities, such as housing, utilities, childcare, transportation, and
45 healthcare, and, except for Alaska and Hawaii, it is not adjusted to
46 reflect cost of living differences across the United States. As a
47 result, millions of struggling families across the country make too little

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1 to afford their basic needs, yet because the federal poverty line is so
2 low, they are not eligible for safety net benefits.

3 The changes to the federal poverty level calculation proposed in the
4 “Poverty Line Act of 2023,” would increase the access to programs,
5 such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and
6 the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which provide
7 critical support to people during times of economic hardship. Notably,
8 the bill would also ensure that the new methodology is reviewed at
9 least once every four years to determine whether it is still reflective of
10 what households need to meet their basic needs and to identify
11 additional changes needed in the future. Ultimately, the enactment of
12 the “Poverty Line Act of 2023” would provide that the determination
13 of poverty in New Jersey and the United States reflects the current
14 level of financial distress experienced by millions of American
15 families, ensuring greater access to the vital government benefits that
16 provide the necessary short- and long-term support and stability to
17 allow for economic mobility.