

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SEATTLE-KING COUNTY
MEMORANDUM

TO:	Full Board
DATE:	December 14, 2023
SUBJECT:	University of Washington Report: <i>Overlooked and Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Washington</i>

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The WDC partners with the University of Washington Center for Women’s Welfare to support regular updates of the Self-Sufficiency Standard. This long-standing partnership has also resulted in the development of the WDC’s Self-Sufficiency Calculator based on the Self-Sufficiency Standard. This year as part of the regular update cycle, the WDC funded a special report: *Overlooked and Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Washington*. This report goes beyond the surface-level economic indicators to reveal the true situation and struggle of many people and families within our region and state.

The purpose outlined in the report states that “developing strategies to ensure Washington State households reach economic security requires data that defines how much is enough and which households are struggling. The *Overlooked and Undercounted* report does just that by revealing the “overlooked and undercounted” of Washington State. This analysis is based on the Washington State Self-Sufficiency Standard, a realistic, geographically and family composition-specific measure of income adequacy, and thus a more accurate alternative to the Official Poverty Measure. Over the last 27 years, calculation of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, in 45 states, has documented the continuing increase in the real cost of living, illuminating the economic crunch experienced by so many families.”

KEY FINDINGS

The report is based on 2021 Washington State Self-Sufficiency Standard data and covers a range of factors including: housing, childcare, health care, transportation, taxes, tax credits, and other miscellaneous expenses. There are key findings from the report that are relevant to the work of the WDC and its racial equity mission:

- The rate of income inadequacy in Washington has grown significantly since 2019.
- When analyzing the range of income inadequacy by county, the highest rates occur in eastern Washington and the Olympic Peninsula.

- Systemic racism results in more people of color struggling to make ends meet in Washington State than White households.
- Being foreign born is associated with higher rates of economic insecurity.
- Households with children are at a greater risk of not meeting their basic needs, accounting for nearly half of households with incomes below the Standard.
- Households led by single mothers experience the highest rates of income inadequacy, with 80 percent unable to cover the cost of basic needs when young children were present.
- The structural disadvantages experienced by women of color are such that they need more education to achieve the same level of economic security as White men.
- Employment is key to income adequacy in Washington State, but it is not a guarantee.

The workforce development system in our region must tackle each of these problems in partnership with a full range of stakeholders, with community leadership at the core. The WDC's push for racial equity and quality jobs are critical components to potential solutions.

CONCLUSION

"It is not about a particular economic crisis; income inadequacy is an everyday, ongoing struggle." This quote from the report is a direct and succinct summary of the current situation in the Washington and King County labor markets. Income adequacy is a struggle for many King County residents and that struggle is compounded by systemic racial inequities. The key findings of this report clearly point out problems that must be addressed. This type of research is foundational to developing the WDC's strategies and engagement in our region.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The full report is available online at <https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/Washington/> and <https://www.seekingwdc.org/>. For further information about the Self-Sufficiency Standard, please visit www.selfsufficiencystandard.org or contact Self-Sufficiency Standard lead researcher and author, Annie Kucklick, at (206) 685-5264/akuckl@uw.edu.