

The Self-Sufficiency Standard

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A MEASURE MAKES

The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures how much income is needed for a family of a certain composition in a given place to adequately meet their basic needs—*without public or private assistance*. The Self-Sufficiency Standard makes it possible to determine if families' incomes are enough to meet basic needs.

The Standard assumes that all adults (whether married or single) work full-time and includes the costs associated with employment—specifically, transportation and taxes, and for families with young children, child care.

The Standard takes into account that many costs differ not only by family size and composition, but also by the age of children. While food and health care costs are slightly lower for younger children, child care costs are much higher—particularly for children not yet in school—and are a substantial budget item not included in the official federal poverty measure.

The Self-Sufficiency Wage for Select U.S. Cities, 2020

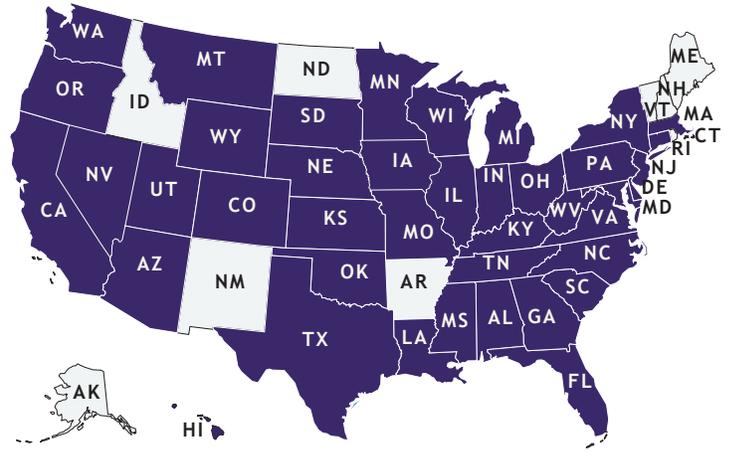
One Adult, One Preschooler, and One School-Age Child

San Francisco, CA**	\$64.86
Northwest Brooklyn, NY**	\$48.99
Boston, MA**	\$47.41
Seattle, WA**	\$39.35
Los Angeles, CA	\$37.64
Chicago, IL**	\$34.18
Denver, CO**	\$33.48
Newark, NJ**	\$30.14
Hartford, CT**	\$30.02
Pittsburgh, PA**	\$28.88
Atlanta, GA**	\$26.48
Houston, TX	\$24.88

HOURLY SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE

**Wage calculated assuming family uses public transportation

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is Calculated for 41 States
Plus the District of Columbia & New York City



The Standard accounts for regional variations in cost. This feature is particularly important for housing. Housing in the most expensive areas of the country costs four times as much as in the least expensive areas for equivalent size units.

The Standard includes the net effect of taxes and tax credits. It accounts for state sales taxes, payroll (Social Security) taxes, and federal and state income taxes. Tax credits available to working adults—such as the Child Care Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and the Earned Income Tax Credit—are “credited” against income, thus reducing the amount needed to become economically self-sufficient.

The Standard accounts for the fact that various costs increase at different rates over time. For example, food costs, on which the official poverty thresholds are based, have not increased as fast as housing costs in most areas. This failure to account for differential inflation rates among other non-food basic needs is one reason that the federal poverty thresholds are no longer an adequate measure of the income required to meet real needs.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard establishes a family sustaining wage specific to most families throughout the United States by making real-world assumptions, varying data regionally and by family type, and including the net effect of taxes and tax credits. A Self-Sufficiency Wage means the family or individual is on the road to economic independence.



CENTER FOR WOMEN'S WELFARE

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

School of Social Work

HOW THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD HAS BEEN USED

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is currently being used to better understand issues of income adequacy, to create and analyze policy, and to help individuals striving to meet their basic needs. Community organizations, academic researchers, policy institutes, legal advocates, training providers, community action agencies, and state and local officials, among others are using the Standard.

POLICY ADVOCACY

Local United Ways in North Carolina use the Self-Sufficiency Standard to address community problems, many through collaborative efforts with government, business, and other nonprofit organizations. The Self-Sufficiency Standard helps local United Ways and their partners build a case for collaborative strategies that will meet community challenges and create lasting change.

In Virginia, Voices for Virginia's Children successfully advocated for the state's TANF Authorization Committee to use the Virginia Self-Sufficiency Standard as a tool for setting eligibility guidelines.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard was an integral tool to increase Maryland's EITC by an additional \$40 million for the state's low-income families.

Alabama Arise led a coalition that successfully advocated for more progressive taxes, increasing the income level at which families begin paying taxes.

Pennsylvania used the Standard as an analysis of the impact of proposed increased child care co-payments on low-income working parents. This analysis was instrumental in preventing the proposed increase.

BENCHMARK FOR EVALUATION

Sonoma County, California adopted the Standard as its formal measure of self-sufficiency and benchmark for measuring success in welfare to work programs.

Under its Workforce Investment Act, the Chicago Workforce Investment Board adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard as its self-sufficiency benchmark.

Counselors at the San Francisco Labor Council calculate vocational ESL students' self-sufficiency level at the beginning and end of the program to gauge the effectiveness of the courses and program.

COUNSELING TOOL

In Washington State, the Self-Sufficiency Calculator is an online tool created by the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County to support career planning with customers and to track progress toward economic self-sufficiency.

In Oregon, the Prosperity Planner, a Self-Sufficiency Standard online counseling tool is used by WorkSource Center staff to determine Training scholarship awards and support service needs of

job seekers. It is also used as a financial counseling tool for job seekers.

LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGNS

Many employers have used the Standard to set living wage policies, including Pennsylvania CAP agencies and the California Child Care Workforce.

The Standard has been used in California, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Hawaii, Nebraska, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington State to advocate for higher wages through Living Wage ordinances and in negotiating labor union agreements.

COMMUNITY INDICATOR

Various states in the Kids Count! project use the Standard as an indicator of economic well-being or security.

Rise Together Bay Area released a dashboard of data tables from their Promoting Family Economic Security Report to track progress on their coalition's goals.

The Missouri Women's Council of the Department of Economic Development used the Standard in the development and promotion of a career program for low-income women that encourages non-traditional career options that pay self-sufficiency wages.

In Portland, Oregon, the City of Portland uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard as one of their core "Measures of Success" in the Portland Plan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Information about the Self-Sufficiency Standard and related research and methodology can be found at www.selfsufficiencystandard.org or by contacting the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington (206) 685-5264 or cwvsss@uw.edu.