U.S. Census Data Show Rochester Poverty Rate, Child Poverty Rate Decreases

Rochester, NY – Poverty rates are on the decline in Rochester.

New data released by the U.S. Census Bureau for the most recent five-year period indicate a decrease in overall poverty rates, child poverty rates, and rates of extreme poverty throughout the City of Rochester. The data, from 2015 to 2019, show the overall poverty rate dropped from 32.6 percent to 31.3 percent compared to the five-year period that ended in 2018.

The data also indicate that:

- Rochester's child poverty rate dropped from 51.0 percent to 47.7 percent.
- The city's rate of extreme poverty (below half the federal poverty line) decreased from 16.2 percent to 15.4 percent.
- There are now more than 5,000 fewer people in poverty, including more than 3,700 fewer children, since the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative first began its work implementing strategies to reduce poverty in 2015. During that time, the total number of people in poverty in Rochester dropped from 67,443 to 62,146 and the total number of children in poverty dropped from 25,674 to 21,970.
- Rochester ranks No. 3 in overall poverty among the nation's 75 largest metropolitan areas.

These statistics were compiled by RMAPI in partnership with the City of Rochester and ACT Rochester based on information gathered by the Census Bureau's five-year American Community Survey. This survey uses a larger sample size, making it the most comprehensive and reliable measure of poverty.

Because the U.S. Census statistics are compiled based on a five-year average, this is the first time that all of the results reflect years RMAPI was working strategically to reduce poverty. The community collaborative was convened in early 2015 and spent months assessing the root causes of poverty and what changes would be needed to bring lasting poverty reduction. Implementation strategies began in 2016.

Using data from this latest survey, the partners updated the list of the 10 poorest cities among the top 75 metropolitan areas in the United States. In 2013, Rochester ranked fifth. Rochester ranked third this year behind Detroit and Cleveland.

"These results show that RMAPI's community collaborative approach is helping move us in the right direction and that by working together, we can make the systemic changes needed for real and significant poverty reduction," says Aqua Porter, RMAPI executive director. "While we are so encouraged to see that more than 5,000 people have been able to move out of poverty through RMAPI's first five years, including more than 3,700 children, we know that there are still tremendous challenges ahead. The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest crisis that Rochester has ever faced, and data collected by RMAPI shows that the effects have disproportionately fallen on the most vulnerable in our community.

"As we face these challenges, we are confident that RMAPI has shown our community the stairway out of poverty. We must continue to make fundamental changes to the systems that have failed people in poverty, often by design. We must continue to push as a community to eradicate structural racism and all of its effects, from legislation that criminalizes poverty to wage disparities that create artificial barriers to self-sufficiency. And we must speak together as a community to advocate for new policies that address and eliminate these disparities. There is much work still to be done, but we are confident that our community will rise to the challenge."

"While today's report on Rochester's poverty rate brings a welcome sign of progress, I will not be satisfied until we have delivered true economic equality to our city," said Mayor Lovely A. Warren. "I am happy that fewer people are living in poverty, but I'm also outraged that most of those who remain in poverty are Black and Brown as a result of our city's shameful history of institutional racism and structural inequality. The economic fallout of the Coronavirus pandemic will certainly exacerbate this disparity, so I am looking forward to working with our partners in the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative and the human service agencies under the control of the Monroe County Executive as we redouble our efforts to provide every resident in Rochester an equal opportunity to reach their full potential."

The 10 Poorest Cities Among Top 75 U.S. Metropolitan Areas		
Rank By Poverty Rate	City	Poverty Rate (%)
1	Detroit, MI	35.0%
2	Cleveland, OH	32.7%
3	Rochester, NY	31.3%
4	Dayton, OH	30.6%
5	Buffalo, NY	30.1%
6	Hartford, CT	28.1%
7	New Haven, CT	26.5%
8	Cincinnati, OH	26.3%
9	Birmingham, AL	25.9%
10	Allentown, PA	25.7%

To put Rochester's poverty rate further into context, we have annually compared it to poverty rates of 17 other principal cities in similar-sized metropolitan areas (those within 200,000 of Rochester's total population). This benchmark group includes Buffalo; Hartford, Conn.; Birmingham, Ala.; Tulsa, Okla.; and Louisville, Ky.

Among this benchmark group, the Census data found that Rochester ranks first in overall poverty, childhood poverty, and extreme poverty.

As a Collective Impact organization, RMAPI is organizing partners to collaborate on poverty in ways never experienced here before, coordinating and aligning institutions around common priorities, policies, practices, and shared measures. This allows for an integrated system that can achieve visible progress at the individual and community levels.

Poverty Rates Among Rochester's Benchmark Cities				
Rank	City	Poverty Rate (%): Overall	Poverty Rate (%): Under 18	Extreme Poverty Rate (%):
1	Rochester, NY	31.3%	47.7%	15.4%
2	Buffalo, NY	30.1%	46.0%	14.9%
3	Hartford, CT	28.1%	37.4%	13.1%
4	Birmingham, AL	25.9%	40.9%	11.7%
5	Fresno, CA	25.2%	35.6%	11.6%
6	McAllen, TX	23.0%	33.5%	8.8%
7	Albany, NY	22.9%	31.4%	12.0%
8	Tucson, AZ	22.5%	30.5%	10.3%
9	Bridgeport, CT	21.8%	31.4%	9.9%
10	Grand Rapids, MI	20.4%	28.9%	9.4%
11	Worcester, MA	20.0%	27.0%	10.7%
12	Tulsa, OK	19.4%	29.7%	9.0%
13	Bakersfield, CA	17.4%	23.2%	8.0%
14	Albuquerque, NM	16.9%	24.0%	7.6%
15	Salt Lake City, UT	16.6%	20.4%	8.0%
16	Louisville, KY	15.9%	24.0%	7.3%
17	Oxnard, CA	13.8%	21.6%	4.5%
Principal cities in all metro areas within 200,000 population (+/-) of Rochester				

In order to create the greatest opportunity for poverty reduction, RMAPI has focused on two critical areas — increasing the affordability and accessibility of basic needs, and improving workforce development.

"Escaping poverty means being able to earn a livable wage, advance through education, bring up children comfortably, enjoy the fruits of one's labor and have a stake in the future of our community. By working for policies that increase earned income while bringing the cost of living within people's reach, RMAPI is providing onramps to the middle class for our neighbors," says Jennifer Leonard, president & CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation. ACT Rochester is a Community Foundation affiliate whose 2013 poverty report helped lead to RMAPI's formation.

For more details on the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, visit www.endingpovertynow.org.

For more details on the earlier poverty reports, visit http://www.racf.org/Reports or http://www.ACTRochester.org/Poverty.