

## Report: Hard work, wages no longer enough for Nebraska families

By ERIN ANDERSEN / Lincoln Journal Star  
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In Lincoln, a single parent raising two kids ages 4 and 8 needs to work 2 1/2 full-time, minimum-wage jobs to meet a family's basic needs.

Move that family to Columbus, and the parent could get by working two full-time, minimum-wage jobs.

Now, move the same family to York, and 1 1/2 full-time jobs should cover food, housing, child care, health care, transportation costs and taxes.

Bottom line: Many hardworking families cannot survive on Nebraska's wages, according to the Family Bottom Line report issued today by Opportunity@Work Coalition.

"Many Nebraskans are playing by the rules, but still are not able to gain financial stability," said Annemarie Bailey Fowler, research and Opportunity@Work coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska, which collaborated with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Community Action of Nebraska and the Center for Rural Affairs to produce the report.

"These families are doing all the right things — working hard, holding down full-time jobs, often more than one job, and doing all they can to take care of their children's (and) family's needs — and they are not getting by."

This is not just a family problem, but a community, business and statewide issue that will require a collaborative approach, the Opportunity@ Work Coalition said.

"The consequence of not recognizing this is a weak link in Nebraska," Fowler said during an online news conference Wednesday. "This is not a family issue, but a workforce issue that impacts the state and the community."

The coalition, which presented its Family Bottom Line report to state legislators and leaders on Wednesday, is calling for a collaborative government, business and community response.

Unlike other reports that use federal income guidelines for determining poverty, The Family Bottom Line report puts real cost-of-living numbers to raising a family in Nebraska.

"It shows that the minimum income necessary for a family to get by is much higher than what is commonly recognized," Fowler said.

Federal guidelines define poverty for a family of four as less than \$21,200 a year.

That means a family with adults working full-time, minimum-wage jobs and bringing home \$27,484 a year should be self-sufficient.

But in reality, that family falls thousands of dollars short of what it actually needs to

cover basic costs of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, such miscellaneous expenses as diapers, clothing and cleaning supplies and taxes, Fowler said.

The gap can be as high as \$13,521, depending on the ages of the children and whether the family lives in a metropolitan, urban or rural area.

The Family Bottom Line uses the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard to determine actual market costs.

Generally speaking, it's more expensive to live in a metropolitan area and have younger children.

The coalition report calls for better-paying jobs, more educational opportunities, more affordable child care and health care, and expanded safety nets to help struggling families get on their feet before losing all of their public financial assistance.

"By working together and recognizing the family bottom line as a current reality for families, we know the vision for Nebraska can be fulfilled — a stronger Nebraska with broad financial stability, cost-effective government and mutual responsibility," Fowler said.

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