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# PRESS RELEASE

The U.S. Census Bureau recently announced the creation of a supplemental measure to the federal poverty level. It's about time! It's been 50 years since the original poverty level was developed and its methodology has yet to be updated. This antiquated measure fails to capture the true number of Michigan elders and families struggling to meet their basic needs.

Elders in Michigan are having a tough time making ends meet with one out of four living on Social Security alone. The average Social Security payment for Michigan's elders is \$13,976 per year for an individual. This payment barely surpasses the original federal poverty line, and is not enough for these elders to be economically secure. According to the Michigan Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index), a geographically-based measure of what elders need to age in place created by Wider Opportunities for Women and the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, a single elder renter needs \$19,058 a year.

The proposed supplemental poverty measure is a good first step, because it will improve on how poverty is currently measured by providing new data including the cost components of food, housing, and clothing. But, the supplemental poverty measure alone is not enough.

Decision makers need tools that accurately reflect the real cost of aging in place. For instance, the Elder Index demonstrates that seniors have high health costs, which may affect their ability to pay for other basic needs. In Michigan an elder in good health pays \$301 a month for health care while an elder in poor health pays \$410. And if

long-term care services are needed, these costs can double or even triple what an elder needs to make ends meet.

Additional data is necessary to better capture elders' real costs and to determine the best way policy makers, administrators and service providers can utilize funds and target strategies to promote economic security.

The supplemental measure is sure to spur continuous and much needed discussion as we grapple with how best to define economic security in our state and in our country. We've already waited too long. Too many elders and their families live without enough to meet their basic needs. Now is the time to move past simply measuring what it means to be deprived to what it means to be secure.

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