



*American Jewish Committee
A Century of Leadership*

AJC STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON POVERTY IN AMERICA

For the past century, AJC's concern for the poor among us and the health of our democracy has caused it to advocate policies that enhance the ability of all Americans to participate meaningfully in our society. To that end, AJC has adopted resolutions expressing its concern as follows: "We believe that the existence of poverty in an affluent society is morally indefensible, breeds hostility and community tension, and alienates one group from another."

Over the past 75 years, the United States has made undeniable progress in reducing and alleviating poverty among its inhabitants. But poverty still exists in America and many people still struggle to put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads, and pursue their dream of a better future. Furthermore, the disparity between the wealthy and the impoverished has increased significantly in recent years, creating concerns for us both as Jews and as Americans as to the maintenance of a just society and the preservation of the social fabric.

Facing these challenges will require AJC to work with allies, old and new, to safeguard successful programs and develop new solutions that will help alleviate the suffering and instability that exist in poor communities throughout the United States. Moreover, as we've seen, low-income Americans are not a monolithic group.

Recognizing this, AJC affirms its commitment to a multi-pronged approach to combating poverty and its ill-effects. We believe the United States should commit itself to the goal of ensuring that all Americans can meet their basic needs and fulfill their full potential, including using the following means:

- I. Protecting the most vulnerable.** Jewish tradition requires us to care for the vulnerable in our communities and to ensure that their basic needs are met. Indeed, the Book of Deuteronomy mandates a permanent responsibility towards those with fewer resources. Some individuals and families face serious problems – such as mental and physical disabilities, chronic illness, poor education, and personal crises – that significantly limit their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Sometimes these conditions are short-lived, sometimes they are enduring. Government, in cooperation whenever possible with community organizations, businesses and organized labor, should help people gain the tools they need to become employed and provide for themselves and should ensure that the most basic needs of society's neediest members for food, clothing, housing, and health care are met. AJC supports policies that both foster independence and protect families from destitution and hardship.

- II. Preserving a just society.** Tikkun olam commands Jews to do the right thing, not just to contribute charitably, but to participate actively in the creation of a just society. The increasing disparity of wealth in the United States creates risks to American democracy and is at odds with our view of social justice. While there are significant and legitimate differences of opinion as to how to deal with this problem, doing so is an obligation and one that falls on governments at all levels – national, state and local. AJC will continue to work to keep government involved and engaged in confronting this problem and working towards a solution to it.
- III. Supporting struggling working families.** Many working families earning low wages need supports so they can stay employed and make ends meet. Thus, AJC supports policies that “make work pay.” These include a meaningful minimum wage, quality child and elder care, wage supplements through the Earned Income Tax Credit, help paying for groceries, health care and health insurance for low-wage workers and their families, housing policies that ensure that working families can afford rent and achieve home ownership, access to education and training that can help workers move up the economic ladder, and policies that assure a healthy labor-management climate. Work supports should be available to hard-working immigrant families who help make our economy work.
- IV. Promoting opportunity.** Jewish tradition teaches that the highest level of *tzedakah* is to provide others with the tools they need to better care for themselves. Like all Americans, poor families want to help their children chart a brighter future. Thus, AJC supports efforts to improve education for children and to expand access to college and job training for low-income teens and adults, including a greater focus on building technical skills among children and adults. For the same reason, AJC supports policies which seek to integrate poor families into the larger community rather than isolating them in high-poverty neighborhoods.
- V. Protecting the Elderly.** AJC supports efforts to assure the financial health of social security, Medicare and Medicaid, which pays for about half of all nursing home care in the United States.

The elimination of poverty requires the application of significant resources. AJC calls for the commitment of such resources and for them to be raised fairly, in a way that does not do harm to the poorest among us.

Finally, AJC supports continuous and intensified efforts to identify the sources of poverty in the United States and to root it out wherever it persists.

Adopted by the Board of Governors on December 11, 2006.