

## TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"

### **POVERTY: AN ELUSIVE CONCEPT! (But only if you want it to be!)**

By Stephen L. Bakke  June 23, 2015



#### *Here's what provoked me:*

*A major investigative article in the Minneapolis StarTribune reported on the explosion of suburban poverty. This was a article on the resent Metropolitan Council's "seminal new" report about poverty around the Twin Cities metro area. I read it with interest, but then they dropped a "bombshell" - kind of a "throwaway disclosure": while the federal government defines the poverty level as \$23,834, the Met Council chose to use \$44,093. That ushers in all sorts of questions that the news reporter didn't know enough to dig into.*

#### *Here's my response:*

#### **Poverty: An Elusive Concept! (But only if you want it to be!)**

Accurate statistics and facts are necessary for proper conclusions and good public policy decisions. I read with interest Shannon Prather's article on June 21, "POVERTY NEARLY DOUBLES IN METRO SUBURBS." Suburban poverty rates are important because of the impact on suburban governance - schools, lunch programs, community services, etc.

The article was based on a Metropolitan Council report which relied on census data. Some highlights from recent years' information:

- Suburban poverty pockets are appearing.
- Suburban and rural poverty has been growing proportionately much faster than did urban poverty rates.
- Far more suburbanites live in poverty than do people in the urban core.
- The number of suburban children taking free or subsidized lunches has almost doubled.

Then, in my opinion, a "throw-away" disclosure discredited the Met Council research. While the federal government defines the poverty level as \$23,834, the Met Council chose to use \$44,093. I couldn't resist considering the following:

- Was \$44,093 chosen rather than the federal statistic in order to create the desired result?
- While measuring increases over time, what poverty numbers were used in the base years?
- Regarding the increase in subsidized school lunches, how did they make adjustments for the effect of expansions in the program?
- When referring to "living in poverty," is the measurement taken before or after food and housing benefits, and other low income transfer payments. That can change the message!

I'd like a little more information before I make decisions based on this report!