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Annual Poverty Scorecard Grades Members of Congress' Efforts on Poverty
Congress Leaves Much Work Undone; Need for State-Level Action Grows

CHICAGO—Despite having many opportunities, Congress did not do enough to help the more than 47 million Americans living in poverty and remained mostly gridlocked on legislation affecting low-income people in 2015, according to a new report from the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law.

The 2016 [Poverty Scorecard](#) identifies important poverty-related legislation considered by Congress in the past year and provides a comprehensive look at how each representative voted. In 2015, the 535 members of Congress cast a total of 9,711 votes on 39 bills, amendments, or resolutions that addressed a wide range of issues important to low-income people, including housing, employment and education. Each member was assigned a letter grade based on his or her votes. The digital report documents a highly polarized Congress, with most members at either the top or the bottom of the grading scale.

“Government has a vital role to play in ensuring the quality of life and chances for upward mobility for those living in poverty,” said Shriver Center President John Bouman. “As Congress remains gridlocked, our analysis highlights the growing opportunities for progress at the state level, where increasingly critical decisions affecting vulnerable communities are being made.”

In one of the few significant wins for people living in poverty, Congress did pass legislation in 2015 that makes key provisions in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) permanent. These improvements help 16 million people, including up to 8 million children, living in or near poverty.

Many policies proposed in 2015, however, would have made the lives of people in poverty worse, including attacks on anti-discrimination laws, affordable health care, and civil legal aid. Congress also missed opportunities to protect low-income people from harmful environmental risks, expand access to early childhood learning opportunities, and promote equal pay for women.

In face of federal inaction on poverty, many states have adopted laws and policies designed to help low-income people. This year's *Poverty Scorecard* features advocacy success stories from the [Legal Impact Network](#) — a broad group of organizations advancing anti-poverty and racial justice policies in 30 states — that illuminate the growing potential for state-level efforts in the fight against poverty.

“We believe much more can be done by lawmakers to adopt policies that address the needs facing low-income Americans,” said Dan Lesser, Director of the Economic Justice Program at the Shriver Center. “The Poverty Scorecard arms the public with critical information and tools to hold their elected officials accountable in advancing policies that promote equity and opportunity for all.”

The full report is available on May 4 via an interactive digital platform at povertyscorecard.org/.





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