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Conference to tackle subject of local poverty

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Elected officials, policy experts, social service providers, faith-based and nonprofit leaders, and representatives from the business community will gather Friday to examine new poverty data for Contra Costa County and discuss policy solutions for reducing poverty. The conference, called Ensuring Opportunity, will also aim to jump start a countywide effort to improve economic outcomes for low-income residents in Contra Costa County.

Fifty years after the war on poverty launched, more than 18 percent of Contra Costa residents – just under 200,000 people – live in poverty and rely on increasingly stretched safety net services. Half of these residents live in four cities: Antioch, Bay Point, Concord and Richmond. One-third are children.

In the last decade, poverty in the suburbs has risen more than any other setting in the United States. Society as a whole benefits when income inequality is reduced and a larger percentage of the populace has adequate wages and purchasing power. But as the economy recovers from the Great Recession, the gap between rich and poor is widening, leaving poor families and individuals further behind.

The conference, organized by Contra Costa's Family Economic Security Partnership and the Contra Costa Safety Net Task Force, will host Senator Mark DeSaulnier, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisor Members Karen Mitchoff and John Gioia, Sarah Bohn of the Public Policy Institute, Kathy Gallagher, director of the Contra Costa Employment & Human Services Department, Mike Herald of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, Kristin Schumacher of the California Budget Project, Ken Archuleta of Emerald Consulting and chair of East Bay Leadership Council, and Jasmine Tarkoff of the Multi-Faith ACTION Coalition.

The conference is funded by First 5 Contra Costa, Kaiser Permanente, Richmond Community Foundation, Y&H Soda Foundation and the Leshner Foundation. It will take place at the Pleasant Hill Community Center, 320 Civic Drive, Pleasant Hill, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Friday, May 16.

For more information, contact Tracy Irwin of First 5 Contra Costa, (925) 381-1860.

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