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## Should poor in La. get state tax break?

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Last Modified: Friday, December 09, 2011 5:48 AM

Should the state of Louisiana ease the taxburden on residents who are living at or near the poverty line?

That's the suggestion of the The Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, which has criticized several states for their tax policies that affect the poor.

The Center, considered to be liberal leaning, said that states that assess poor families income tax, among them Louisiana, make it difficult for those families to escape poverty.

According to the Center, which researches tax and budget policies, the Bayou State is one of 11 that taxes single-parent families of three living below the federally-recognized 2010 poverty level of \$17,374 annual income.

Louisiana was also one of 15 states, according to the report, in which a two-parent family of four living at the poverty level of \$22,314 still had to pay state income tax.

Louisiana is also one of 22 states that taxes a family of three living 125 percent above the poverty line (\$21,718) and one of 23 states that taxes a family of four at the same level (\$27,893).

"The federal government has exempted such families from the income tax since the mid-1980s, and a majority of states now do as well," the report said.

It noted that the number of states with income taxes on working-poor families has dropped from 24 to 15 since 1990.

The Center's report got plenty of push-back from Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration.

Spokesman Kyle Plotkin told The Advocate of Baton Rouge that the state does not assess a tax on food for home consumption and allows a state Earned Income Tax Credit and a school supplies tax credit.

Plotkin also noted that Louisiana allows low income earners to claim 3.5 percent of their federal EITC on their state returns.

He also noted that those earning between \$0 and \$20,000 pay an average tax rate of less than than 0.1 percent.

Louisiana Budget Project Director Jan Moller agrees that poor families in Louisiana are not over-taxed, but argues that those living at or near the poverty line need every penny they receive just to get by.

He advocates the state increasing the EITC amount that the poor can claim on their state tax return.

State Sen. Lydia Jackson, D-Shreveport, sponsored legislation that originally called for the state EITC to be 5 percent of the federal EITC. The percentage was negotiated to 3.5 percent.

She admits raising the state EITC percentage now, given the state's ongoing budget struggles, would be difficult.

Moeller has a point, but there's a counter-argument that the poor use vital services like state roads, the education system and Medicaid and should contribute to pay for these services, no matter how little.

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