

Price of Living too Much for Many

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Nearly half of all families in Pulaski County cannot afford to rent a standard two-bedroom unit, according to recently released information.

A national report that provides data on the cost of rental housing for every county, metropolitan area and state in the nation indicates an estimated 46 percent of renters in Virginia do not earn enough to afford a two-bedroom unit at the Fair Market Rent (FMR).

The numbers for Pulaski County are slightly better, as an estimated 41 percent of renters are unable to afford a two-bedroom unit at the FMR.

A typical two-bedroom unit in Virginia requires \$40,841 of income per year, while a similar unit in Pulaski County requires \$22,840.

The average Pulaski County resident must work 43 hours a week at \$10.17 per hour to afford a meager two-bedroom unit at the FMR.

The news is worse for those in Pulaski County working at minimum wage (\$7.25). In order to afford the same two-bedroom unit, those working at the minimum wage must work 61 hours per week.

The Housing Wage (the hourly wage a family must earn working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year to be able to afford rent and utilities in the private housing market) is \$19.63 in Virginia, while Pulaski County's is \$10.98. Virginia's Housing Wage has increased 54 percent since 2000 – the 10th largest increase among the states.

The report, Out of Reach 2010, was jointly released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), a Washington, DC-based housing policy organization, and the Virginia Housing Coalition. The report provides the Housing Wage and other data for every state, metropolitan area, combined non-metropolitan area, and county in the country.

"Again, the Out of Reach data demonstrates that it is becoming more difficult for low income families to find decent homes they can afford in Virginia," said Orlando Artze, president of the Virginia Housing Coalition. "The recession has only made a bad situation worse. We must act now to ensure that low income families have access to the safe and affordable housing they so desperately need."

Working at the \$7.25 minimum wage rate, a family must have 2.7 wage earners working full-time or one full-time earner working 108 hours per week to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment. The typical renter in Virginia earns \$15.22 per hour, which is \$4.41 less than the hourly wage needed to afford a modest unit. In Pulaski County, that number falls to \$10.17 per hour.

In the Northern Virginia area, including Arlington and Alexandria, the numbers are even worse. The Housing Wage in that part of the state is a whopping \$28.73 while the typical renter in the area earns only \$20.54 per hour.

This year, Virginia is the 12th most expensive state in the nation for renters. The National Housing Wage is \$18.44 in 2010.