

Press Conference Statement  
Father Fred Kammer, SJ, Executive Director  
Jesuit Social Research Institute  
Loyola University New Orleans  
May 3, 2018



Good afternoon and thank you for coming. My name is Father Fred Kammer, SJ, and I am the Executive Director of the Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) at Loyola University New Orleans. JSRI was founded in 2007 as a partnership between Loyola and the Jesuits of the South to look more deeply at the social realities of post-Katrina New Orleans and the Gulf South states in the interest of promoting a more just society in light of Catholic Social Teaching. The study which we release today—*The JustSouth Index 2017*—is made possible by a generous grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation as part of their focused concern for poor and vulnerable families in Louisiana, Mississippi, and elsewhere. This report is the second such annual report in a planned series.

Our institute and this study specifically focus on three core dimensions that reflect the history of the South’s slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and continuing inequality, namely: racial disparities, poverty, and immigrant exclusion. Geographically our mission focuses on the region of the Gulf South which includes the five states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. For years we discussed and debated how to measure how well or poorly we are doing in the Gulf South in addressing our core social problems and promoting human wellbeing.

While human wellbeing can be approached through a variety of measures, one which has gained wide acceptance for over twenty years on an international scale is the United Nations’ *Human Development Report*. Unlike much current political debate which looks primarily at poverty, the focus here is on a broader consideration of “human development,” drawing on the work of the late economist Mahbub ul Haq at the United Nations and World Bank.

...Dr. Haq argued that *existing measures of human progress failed to account for the true purpose of development—to improve people’s lives*. In particular, he believed that the commonly used measure of Gross Domestic Product failed to adequately measure well-being.<sup>1</sup>

As I indicated, the index developed by Dr. Haq and others focuses on three key facets of human well-being—a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. In other words, the measures look primarily at *health, education, and economic security*.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Human Development Project of the Social Science Research Council, *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009*, p. 10. Cf. <http://www.measureofamerica.org> (accessed 1/29/10).

Following that approach, for our *JustSouth Index*, we at JSRI have selected nine key social indicators measuring aspects of health, education, and economic security within the dimensions of racial disparity, poverty, and immigrant exclusion.<sup>2</sup> We consider racial disparity, poverty, and immigrant exclusion to be compelling proxies for social justice in our region and across the country.

In order to measure how the Gulf South states are doing, it has been necessary for us to apply these nine indicators to all fifty states and the District of Columbia. We have chosen indicators which are reported annually, measurable, clear, reliable, common across all jurisdictions, *and actionable*. I emphasize “actionable” because, in releasing the original *JustSouth Index* and this first annual update, our purposes are to educate people and to point out how we together can make the kind of changes that promote far greater social justice, equity, and inclusion for all of us.

Because we began with the desire to improve the wellbeing of people, our *JustSouth Index* specifically discusses ways in which policymakers, employers, and all of us can work together to change society. Even more specifically, throughout the report we give more detailed analyses and recommendations for action steps to improve each of the nine social indicators.

I now want to turn the podium over to our economic policy specialist, Dr. Ali Bustamante, who was the principal investigator for the research project and principal author of this second *JustSouth Index*. Dr. Bustamante will further explain the details of the Index and its implications. After his presentation, we have invited Dr. Lane Windham (and guest) representing Georgetown University’s Kalmonovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor and Dr. James Sullivan of the University of Notre Dame’s Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities to expand our understanding of the systemic factors that contribute to inequity and innovative approaches to effective responses.

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<sup>2</sup> Social indicators are used annually by the United Nations to measure 188 countries plus other territories. Cf. *Human Development Report 2015*. Social indicator methodologies also now are increasingly widespread. Prominent users include the Annie Casey Foundation (*Kids Count Index*), the Urban League, United Way of America (*Goals for the Common Good*), MDC, the Migration Policy Institute, the Center for American Progress, the Southern Grown Policies Board, and Oxfam America.

Press Conference Statement  
Alí Bustamante, Ph.D.  
Jesuit Social Research Institute  
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Good afternoon, I am Dr. Alí Bustamante, economic policy specialist for Loyola University New Orleans' Jesuit Social Research Institute.

The *JustSouth Index 2017* measures and compares all 50 states and Washington D.C. on nine quantitative indicators that fall under the dimensions of poverty, racial disparity and immigrant exclusion—three of the most challenging issues facing the U.S. today. Although there are many elements of society that contribute to social justice, these three dimensions present a point in time assessment of the wellbeing of vulnerable populations in each state.

Page eight of the report explains the nine indicators we employed in the development of the *JustSouth Index*. The poverty dimension includes the average income of poor households, the level of health insurance coverage for the poor, and the prevalence of housing affordability. The racial disparity dimension incorporates measures of school segregation, white-minority wage equity, and white-minority employment equity. Lastly, the immigrant exclusion dimension includes indicators of immigrant youth outcomes, immigrant English proficiency, and health insurance coverage for immigrants.

Based on these indicators, Washington, D.C. ranked 50th while the five Gulf South states all ranked especially low, with Louisiana lowest at 51st, Texas at 49th, Alabama at 47th, Mississippi at 46<sup>th</sup>, and Florida slightly higher at 35th. Vermont ranked highest in the nation.

The *JustSouth Index* is designed to measure, on an annual basis, progress made and ground lost on issues of social justice. Each indicator included in the index is actionable, meaning that improvement is possible if sufficient political and social will is focused on taking the required steps forward.

The lack of affordable health insurance coverage and housing options among the poor contributes to economic poverty and also undermines the ability to work, to be educated, and to live a long and healthy life. Ensuring that all people are able to enjoy a basic standard of living preserves human dignity and strengthens the common good of the whole society.

Yet, the average annual income for households in the bottom 25 percent was about \$11,000 in Mississippi and Louisiana, the lowest incomes in the U.S. This is compared to the

national annual average of \$15,384 and the current federal poverty line of \$25,100 a year for a family of four.

Those living in poverty suffer from material deprivation and negative psychosocial effects that undermine their dignity, diminish their life prospects, and reduce their ability to contribute to the common good. Raising the minimum wage and strengthening investments in child care assistance and the Earned Income Tax Credit would improve the standard of living for millions across the U.S.

Similarly, the disproportionate advantages for white Americans in relation to persons of color in virtually every sphere of life illustrate the unmistakable legacy of discrimination and the deep divisions that exist despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Our data show that more than half of schools (57%) in Washington, D.C. are considered segregated and have a student population that is 90 percent or more one race despite a significantly different student population in the area. Similarly, more than one in five public schools in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi are racially segregated. This is compared to the national average of 14% and only 1% in Hawaii, the state that ranked highest on that indicator.

Acknowledging and countering the lingering effects of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, white supremacy, and the dominance of racial prejudice are imperative steps to creating a more just society. Increasing resources to schools that serve primarily minority and immigrant students, and combatting employment discrimination through enhanced enforcement efforts by government entities would promote racial equity.

Lastly, the treatment of immigrants and immigrant integration is an important dimension of social justice because it represents the way in which a society protects or denigrates human dignity based on nation of origin.

However, we find that one in five of immigrant youth ages 18-25 are considered “disconnected,” in Texas, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Utah, meaning that these youth are not attending school and do not have regular employment. This is often the result of inadequate accommodations in public high schools for English language learners and lack of job training or GED services for immigrant youth who have left the public education system.

Catholic social teaching recognizes that, as people of good will, church and society must comprehensively serve the needs of migrants. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all people and government to create the political, economic, and social conditions for persons to live in dignity, access just employment, and raise their families irrespective of their naturalization status.

The *JustSouth Index* provides a strong starting point for determining not only where inequity is most problematic, but also what systemic factors contribute to the inequity. Inclusive economic and social progress is possible if we focus on equity and justice. Increasing income equity, access to health insurance coverage, racial equality, and community support for immigrants will improve social justice and preserve human dignity. Furthermore, Catholic principles call us to address these structural injustices that undermine human dignity and the common good.



JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (out of 51)

OVERALL **35**

POVERTY **51**

RACIAL DISPARITY **18**

IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION **25**



**29.3%**

5th highest share of low-income people without health insurance in U.S.<sup>1</sup>



**70.1%**

14th highest share of low-income people with a housing cost burden in U.S.<sup>3</sup>



**\$14,488**

14th lowest average income among low-income households in U.S.<sup>2</sup>

**ACTION STEPS:**

**Expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.**

- + Extend Medicaid eligibility to households with incomes below 138% of the federal poverty level, insuring about 732,000 additional Floridians.<sup>4</sup>
- + 32 states and D.C. already have expanded Medicaid.

**Increase the state's minimum wage above \$8.25 per hour and rescind the 2003 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.**

- + More than 1 in 5 workers (20.1%) in Florida earn wages at or below \$10 an hour.<sup>5</sup>
- + State minimum wage increases boost incomes that result in additional consumer spending at the community level, which benefits local businesses, and in lower poverty rates, which benefit the community as a whole.

**Increase affordable housing resources.**

- + Only 15.5% rental housing created in Florida between 2000 and 2015 are affordable to low-income households.<sup>6</sup>
- + Expand rental assistance by exclusively applying funds from Florida's Sadowski Act to affordable housing programs.

1 JSRI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Dorn, S. & Buettgens, M. (2017). The Cost of Not Expanding Medicaid: An Updated Analysis. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89986/2001246\\_the\\_cost\\_of\\_not\\_expanding\\_medicaid\\_updated\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89986/2001246_the_cost_of_not_expanding_medicaid_updated_analysis.pdf)

5 JSRI analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey 2016.

6 Shimberg Center for Housing Studies. (2017). Florida's Affordable Rental Housing Needs: An Update. Retrieved from [http://www.shimberg.ufl.edu/publications/FL\\_2017\\_RMS\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.shimberg.ufl.edu/publications/FL_2017_RMS_fact_sheet.pdf)



JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (out of 51)

OVERALL **46**

POVERTY **50**

RACIAL DISPARITY **46**

IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION **26**



**\$11,051**

1st lowest average income among low-income households in U.S.<sup>1</sup>



**16.1%**

4th biggest white-minority wage gap in U.S.<sup>3</sup>



**32.4%**

2nd highest share of low-income people without health insurance in U.S.<sup>2</sup>



**22.4%**

9th most segregated schools in U.S.<sup>4</sup>

**ACTION STEPS:**

**Legislate a state minimum wage higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 2014 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.**

- + More than 1 in 4 workers (26.5%) in Mississippi earn wages at or below \$10 an hour.<sup>5</sup>
- + In 2016, the median/typical wage of \$15 per hour in Mississippi was the lowest in the country.<sup>6</sup>
- + State minimum wages increase incomes that result in additional consumer spending at the community level, which benefits local businesses, and in lower poverty rates, which benefit the community as a whole.
- + 29 states and D.C. already have created their own minimum wage laws that are higher than the federal minimum wage.<sup>7</sup>

**Expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.**

- + Extend Medicaid eligibility to households with incomes below 138% of the federal poverty level, insuring about 136,000 additional Mississippians.<sup>8</sup>
- + 32 states and D.C. already have expanded Medicaid.

**Investigate discriminatory labor practices.**

- + Establish a Civil Rights Division within the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) to investigate complaints of discriminatory practices by employers.
- + Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, sex, or ethnic origin.

1 JSRI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

2 Ibid.

3 JSRI analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey 2016.

4 JSRI analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Elementary/Secondary Information System, 2014-2015.

5 JSRI analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey 2016.

6 Ibid.

7 U.S. Department of Labor. (2018, January 8). Minimum Wage Laws in the States. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>

8 Dorn, S. & Buettgens, M. (2017). The Cost of Not Expanding Medicaid: An Updated Analysis. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89986/2001246\\_the\\_cost\\_of\\_not\\_expanding\\_medicaid\\_updated\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89986/2001246_the_cost_of_not_expanding_medicaid_updated_analysis.pdf)



JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (out of 51)

OVERALL **47**

POVERTY **44**

RACIAL DISPARITY **47**

IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION **46**



**\$11,744**

4th lowest average income among low-income households in U.S.<sup>1</sup>



**22.8%**

6th most segregated schools in U.S.<sup>3</sup>



**14.2%**

5th biggest white-minority wage gap in U.S.<sup>2</sup>



**4.6%**

8th biggest white-minority unemployment gap in U.S.<sup>4</sup>

**ACTION STEPS:**

**Legislate a state minimum wage higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 2016 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.**

- + More than 1 in 5 workers (22%) in Alabama earn wages at or below \$10 an hour.<sup>5</sup>
- + State minimum wages increase incomes that result in additional consumer spending at the community level, which benefits local businesses, and in lower poverty rates, which benefit the community as a whole.
- + 29 states and D.C. already have created their own minimum wage laws that are higher than the federal minimum wage.<sup>6</sup>

**Investigate discriminatory labor practices.**

- + Establish a Civil Rights Division within the Alabama Department of Labor to investigate complaints of discriminatory practices by employers.

- + Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, sex, or ethnic origin.

**Increase state enforcement of school desegregation.**

- + Establish accountability measures and best practices for desegregation in school districts.
- + Increase state funding of public schools and secure equal funding allocation to minority-majority schools.
- + Segregation fosters social and economic inequities by race, what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the false sense of superiority of the segregators and the false sense of inferiority of the segregated.”<sup>7</sup>

1 JSRI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

2 JSRI analysis of U.S. Department of Labor. 2016 Current Population Survey Microdata.

3 JSRI analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Elementary/Secondary Information System, 2014-2015.

4 JSRI analysis of U.S. Department of Labor. 2016 Current Population Survey Microdata.

5 Ibid.

6 U.S. Department of Labor. (2018, January 8). Minimum Wage Laws in the States. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>

7 King, Martin Luther Jr. (2013). A Time to Break Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr., for Students. Ed. Walter Dean Myers. Boston: Beacon Press.





JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (out of 51)

OVERALL **49**

POVERTY **48**

RACIAL DISPARITY **19**

IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION **50**



**34.7%**

1st highest share of low-income people without health insurance in U.S.<sup>1</sup>



**19.8%**

4th most foreign-born disconnected youth in U.S.<sup>3</sup>



**39.5%**

2nd highest share of foreign-born residents not speaking English fluently in U.S.<sup>2</sup>



**22.5%**

8th highest gap in health insurance coverage between native and foreign-born residents in U.S.<sup>4</sup>

**ACTION STEPS:**

**Expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.**

- + Extend Medicaid eligibility to households with incomes below 138% of the federal poverty level, insuring over 1 million additional Texans.<sup>5</sup>
- + 32 states and D.C. already have expanded Medicaid.

**Assist non-English speakers.**

- + Increase funding to educational support services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and community-based language instruction.
- + Provide immigrants the opportunity to learn English facilitating their integration into the local community, helping them become more economically productive, and allowing them to participate more fully in society.<sup>6</sup>

**Support foreign-born youth.**

- + Increase funding to GED preparation programs and community-based mentoring programs.
- + Provide job training programs, apprenticeships, and broad workplace assistance to young workers.

1 JSRI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Dorn, S. & Buettgens, M. (2017). The Cost of Not Expanding Medicaid: An Updated Analysis. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89986/2001246\\_the\\_cost\\_of\\_not\\_expanding\\_medicaid\\_updated\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89986/2001246_the_cost_of_not_expanding_medicaid_updated_analysis.pdf)

6 Gonzalez, L. (2005). Nonparametric bounds on the returns to language skills. *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 20(6), 771-795.



JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (out of 51)



**\$11,076**

2nd lowest average income among low-income households in U.S.<sup>1</sup>



**22.7%**

8th most segregated schools in U.S.<sup>3</sup>



**18.5%**

2nd biggest white-minority wage gap in U.S.<sup>2</sup>



**4.9%**

6th biggest white-minority unemployment gap in U.S.<sup>4</sup>

**ACTION STEPS:**

**Legislate a state minimum wage higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 2012 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages and sick leave policies.**

- + More than 1 in 5 workers (22%) in Louisiana earn wages at or below \$10 an hour.<sup>5</sup>
- + State minimum wages increase incomes that result in additional consumer spending at the community level, which benefits local businesses, and in lower poverty rates, which benefit the community as a whole.
- + 29 states and D.C. already have created their own minimum wage laws that are higher than the federal minimum wage.<sup>6</sup>

**Investigate discriminatory labor practices.**

- + Establish a Civil Rights Division within the Louisiana Workforce Commission to investigate complaints of discriminatory practices by employers.

- + Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, sex, or ethnic origin.

**Increase state enforcement of school desegregation.**

- + Establish accountability measures and best practices for desegregation in school districts.
- + Increase state funding of public schools and secure equal funding allocation to minority-majority schools.
- + Segregation fosters social and economic inequities by race, what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the false sense of superiority of the segregators and the false sense of inferiority of the segregated.”<sup>7</sup>

1 JSRI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

2 JSRI analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey 2016.

3 JSRI analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Elementary/Secondary Information System, 2014-2015.

4 JSRI analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey 2016.

5 Ibid.

6 U.S. Department of Labor. (2018, January 8). Minimum Wage Laws in the States. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>

7 King, Martin Luther Jr. (2013). A Time to Break Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr., for Students. Ed. Walter Dean Myers. Boston: Beacon Press.