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**Loyola University New Orleans Jesuit Social Research Institute releases a new report:
*State of Working Mississippi 2020***

New report documents the extent of the hardships experienced by Mississippi's poor and working families both before and during the pandemic

(New Orleans, LA – December 22, 2020) The *State of Working Mississippi 2020* report released today by the Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) of Loyola University New Orleans paints a rather bleak picture of the social and economic conditions experienced by the men, women and children of Mississippi.

A few of the key facts presented in the report:

- Workers in Mississippi have the lowest median hourly wage in the country.
- Household income in Mississippi is the lowest in the nation.
- The state has the highest poverty rate.
- Mississippi ranks 46th out of the 50 states and Washington, DC, in the percent of the population without health insurance.
- The state has been identified as the least educated in the nation.
- Mississippi is overwhelmed by the COVID-19 crisis and suffering disproportionately.

According to JSRI Director Fr. Fred Kammer, S.J., J.D., “One of the most important aspects of this year’s report is how it helps to explain both the horrendous health impact of the Coronavirus in Mississippi and its devastating economic repercussions. Together they have created the ‘perfect storm’ for Mississippi workers and their families.”

But the researchers at JSRI believe such unfortunate circumstances are not cast in stone. There is a way out and up. Among the report’s policy suggestions are:

- Significantly increase the state minimum wage and repeal state preemption that prevents local communities from instituting their own minimum wage.
- Expand Medicaid (as provided by the Affordable Care Act) so that everyone with income below 138% of poverty will be covered.
- Change labor laws to provide greater protections for workers and make it easier for them to unionize, such as reclassifying many independent contractors/gig workers as regular employees.
- Increase spending on education at all levels.

Mississippi community leaders, upon reading the report, concur with the results and the call to action for all Mississippians. Msgr. Elvin Sunds, M.Div., MSW, Chair of the Faith in Action Team for the Diocese of Jackson, put it this way, “*The State of Working Mississippi* shows that poverty and racism go hand-in-hand affecting every aspect of life. And COVID-19 is a wound on a wound for the poor and minorities of Mississippi.”

Roy Mitchell, Executive Director of the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program, underscored the report’s call for Medicaid expansion: “With COVID-19 cases rising, the stabilization of our state health care system is paramount. Expanding Medicaid accomplishes this by significantly decreasing uncompensated care, allowing hospitals and clinics to stay financially viable. Moreover, COVID-19 infections and deaths have disproportionately occurred within minority communities due to higher rates of exposure and higher rates of chronic disease caused by centuries of systemic inequities. In the face of the most significant public health crisis of our generation, Medicaid expansion in Mississippi cannot wait.”

Lastly, Robert Schaffer, President, Mississippi AFL-CIO, emphasized the concrete steps in the report that can transform Mississippi now: "The information and graphics contained in this report should be the wake-up call Mississippi leaders need to take action. The hard working yet long-suffering people of our state cannot wait any longer. We deserve better and the report lays out steps that can be taken now that would give birth to a new Mississippi, a state that can be a model of social and economic development for all."

The full report can be found [here](#).

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Loyola University New Orleans is a Catholic, Jesuit university located in the heart of the picturesque Uptown neighborhood of New Orleans. For more than 100 years, Loyola has helped shape the lives of its students, as well as the history of the city and the world, through educating men and women in the Jesuit traditions of academic excellence and service to others. Loyola’s more than 40,000 graduates serve as catalysts for change in their communities as they exemplify the comprehensive, values-laden education received at Loyola.