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Serious Relief, but Challenges Ahead The American Rescue Plan

By Fred Kammer, S.J., J.D.

Take Five For Social

Justice



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Stop Solitary Confinement

JSRI Future Activities

April 15

The JSRI Advisory Board, chaired by Dr. Marcus Kondkar, will participate virtually in their semi-annual meeting with the JSRI staff.

April 27

Fr. Kammer will provide a virtual keynote for the St. Louis *Seeds of Justice* Spring 2021 Convening on how to do a faith-based work for justice in a country and Church filled with division.

JSRI staff and associates—working from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network.

JSRI Recent Activities

February 25

JSRI Associate Mary Baudouin and Dr. Sue Weishar joined 30 other colleagues at Jesuit institutions across the U.S. for the first class of *The Theological Dynamics of the Ignatian Spirituality*, an 11 week course being taught via Zoom by St. Louis University Professor Hun T. Pham, SJ.

March 3

Dr. Weishar co-led a planning meeting for a staff retreat for the employees and volunteers of El Pueblo, an organization that provides legal and social services to vulnerable immigrants in Mississippi.

March 10

Fr. Kammer did a presentation on modern Jesuit mission-history as part of the programming for Loyola Homecoming Week.

March 13

Dr. Dennis Kalob gave a talk at the Gillespie-Senter Memorial Community Breakfast (held virtually) in New Orleans. He discussed our most recent [JustSouth Index](#).

March 22

Fr. Kammer participated virtually as vice-chair in the national meeting of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

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A family interviewed for the [SNAP Story Bank Project](#).

The Urban Institute has analyzed four components of the Rescue Plan which together have a demonstrable impact on the projected poverty rate for 2021 and on the racial disparities of poverty in this country. The four provisions are: (1) extension for 25 weeks through September 6th of the pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits; (2) extension for three months until September 30th of higher Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program); (3) one-time \$1,400 direct recovery payments to individuals, \$2800 to married couples, and \$1400 for each dependent; and (4) provision of monthly advance payments beginning in July 2021 of the increased child tax credit for the 2021 tax year. The second half would be paid monthly in 2022. [1]

Without these new benefits, the projected level of U.S. poverty for 2021 under what is called the Supplemental Poverty Rate is 13.7 percent. [2] The combined effect of these four provisions alone is to reduce the poverty level by more than a third to 8.7 percent. This would reduce the number of people living in poverty by 16 million people, from 44 million to 28 million. [3]

In terms of racial disparities, these four provisions combined would reduce the poverty rates as follows:

- For Black, non-Hispanic people by 42 percent, from 18.1 percent to 10.5 percent;
- For Hispanic people by 39 percent, from 21.9 percent to 13.3 percent; and
- For white, non-Hispanic people by 34 percent, from 9.6 percent to 6.4 percent. [4]

Many other provisions of the new law will benefit lower-income families, as well as others. There are improvements and increased funding for WIC, [5] energy assistance, water bills, COVID-19 relief, vaccinations, school and child care reopenings, state and local governments, the Earned Income Tax Credit, Head Start, the Community Development Block Grant, Medicaid expansion, and premium assistance under the Affordable Care Act.

The sponsors of the \$1.9 trillion law project that the combined effect will be a strong stimulus to the economy, in addition to all the targeted effects for low-income families and particular people, programs, and state and local government services.

Concerns about the law include: the complete absence of Republican congressional support, [6] elimination of a minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour as well as any moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, exclusion of undocumented people from most benefits, failure to include the long-established, bipartisan Hyde Amendment language to prevent federal funding of abortions, and the temporary status of many improvements. In addition, despite the four highlighted programs which reduce poverty, there still will be tens of millions of Americans living in poverty this year.

[1] Wheaton, L., Mintor, S., Giannarelli, L., & Dwyer, K. (2021, March 11). 2021 Poverty Projections: Assessing Four American Rescue Plan Policies. Urban Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/2021-poverty-projections-assessing-four-american-rescue-plan-policies>

[2] This is an expanded poverty measure used by the Census Bureau that "considers not only a family's cash income but also tax payments, tax credits, in-kind benefits such as nutrition assistance, and the rebate checks." Ibid., 3.

[3] Ibid., 4.

[4] Ibid., 6.

[5] The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five.

[6] This contrasts sharply with the December, 2020, pandemic-related stimulus bill passed by Congress with a 92-6 Senate vote and a vote of 359-53 in the House.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

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