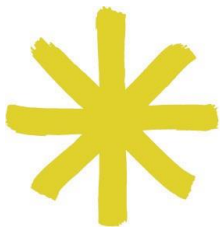




POLICY REPORT  
APRIL 2018

# Poverty in Buffalo: Causes, Impacts, Solutions

A Report for the Truth Commission on  
Poverty in Western New York



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PUBLIC GOOD**



## Executive Summary

Fifty years after Martin Luther King, Jr. launched the Poor People's Campaign, the nation's commitment to reducing poverty has rarely been weaker, and millions of people are suffering as a result. Poverty is not natural or inevitable; rather, it reflects policy choices. The key findings from this study of poverty in Buffalo-Niagara include the following.

### Scope

- In 2016, Buffalo-Niagara's poverty rate was 13.8 percent, lower than the state rate of 14.7 percent and the national rate of 14 percent.
- The region is not unusually poor, but it is unusually unequal in geographic and racial terms.
  - The 2016 poverty rate in the city of Buffalo was 30.5 percent.
  - Deep poverty is even more concentrated in the city. Of households with incomes below \$10,000, 48 percent live in Buffalo.
  - The region's poverty rate for African-Americans was 32.3 percent while for whites it was only 9.3 percent.
  - Only 14 percent of the region's white people live in areas of concentrated poverty, but 64 percent of people of color do.

### Causes

#### INCOMES

- Roughly one third of the region's jobs are service sector jobs that pay less than \$26,000 per year, including:
  - Over 61,000 food service workers (median income, \$19,660);

This policy report was drafted by Sam Magavern, Executive Director at Partnership for the Public Good, with research and contributions by University at Buffalo School of Law students Alyssa Bergsten, David Clayton, Chad Davenport, Orlando Dickson, Melissa Kathan, and Hayley Ross.

It examines the scope of poverty and inequality in Buffalo-Niagara, the causes of poverty, and its impacts across health, homelessness, education, and more. The report concludes with solutions from the local to the federal level.

The report features the insights of testifiers and commissioners from the Buffalo Truth Commission on Poverty, convened on January 25, 2018 by the Coalition for Economic Justice, the WNY Poor People's Campaign, and the New York State Truth Commission on Poverty.

- Over 24,000 retail salespeople (median income, \$20,320);
- Over 9,000 personal care attendants (median income, \$23,640).

#### EXPENSES

- **Housing.** More than half of Buffalo households (55 percent) cannot afford their rent. The federal government spends \$85.4 billion per year on housing aid for households with incomes over \$100,000 (largely through tax deductions), but only \$34.6 billion per year on households with incomes under \$30,000.
- **Food.** In Western New York, 20 percent of children are food insecure, and over 60,000 people receive SNAP benefits. But the average SNAP benefit in the U.S. is just \$126.39 a month, while the United Way's Household Survival Budget puts monthly food costs at \$202 for a single adult and \$612 for a family of four.
- **Childcare.** In Erie County, the cost of center-based child care for one infant is \$12,792 per year, more than SUNY tuition. The U.S. spends less than half of 1 percent of its federal budget on child care, while other developed countries spend anywhere from 2 percent to 7 percent. As a result, only one out of six children eligible for federally funded child care assistance actually receives it.
- **Transportation.** From 2010 to 2014 the share of income that people in the bottom third of incomes spent on transportation increased from 9 percent to 14 percent in the United States. Over 56,700 households in Buffalo-Niagara do not own a vehicle, but almost 58 percent of jobs in the region are beyond the reach of public transit.

## Impacts

#### HEALTH

- People in poverty have much higher risks for many diseases, including a 50 percent higher risk of heart disease and a 50 percent higher rate of type 2 diabetes.
- 8.7 percent of adults with income below the federal poverty level experience serious psychological distress, compared with only 1.2 percent of those with incomes of at least 400 percent of the poverty level.
- In Buffalo, the life expectancy of African-Americans is five years shorter than that of whites.
- Buffalo's African-American residents are six times more likely than whites to live in a neighborhood without access to a grocery store
  - In the United States, low-income families are eight times more susceptible to lead poisoning; in Erie County, lead poisoning rates are high, and the cases are overwhelmingly concentrated in poor communities of color.

- A recent survey of over 200 workers in Buffalo found that 56 percent of them reported at least one potential health and safety violation by their employer.

#### HOMELESSNESS

- In Erie County, an estimated 5,455 people experienced homelessness in 2015. In 2016, that number rose almost ten percent to 5,953.
- Roughly 16 percent of Buffalo Public Schools students have experienced homelessness.

#### Education

- Nationally, students in the bottom 20 percent of family incomes are five times more likely to drop out of high school than those in the top 20 percent of all family incomes.
- 73.9 percent of the variation in test scores between different schools in Western New York can be explained by the difference in their poverty populations.

#### CRIME VICTIMIZATION

- People living in poverty are twice as likely as those with high incomes to experience violent crime.
- In 2016 Buffalo was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> for violent crimes among major cities.
- A recent survey of over 200 workers in Buffalo found that 58.9 percent of them reported at least one wage and hour violation by their employer.

#### Solutions

- To raise incomes for working people, enhance their right to organize and bargain collectively and raise minimum and living wage levels.
- To reduce expenses, increase funding for basic needs such as affordable housing, public transportation, nutrition, and quality childcare and preschool.
- Support the 2018 Community Agenda, which includes planks regarding improved public transit; fair, affordable, and lead-safe housing; community policing and criminal justice reform; and support for people with disabilities, refugees and immigrants and other residents particularly vulnerable to poverty and discrimination.

## Introduction

In 1967 Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) began planning a Poor People's Campaign. They were frustrated that their civil rights victories had not translated into more economic gains for people of color and frustrated that the federal government was pouring resources and attention into the war in Vietnam and neglecting the "War on Poverty" that President Johnson had declared in 1964. Despite the assassination of Dr. King in April 1968, the SCLC and its allies forged ahead with the campaign, and in May 1968 thousands of poor people and activists established a tent city known as "Resurrection City" on the National Mall in Washington, which lasted for roughly six weeks and had its own zip code, city hall, and university.

The Committee of 100 that helped organize the campaign drafted an Economic Bill of Rights with five planks:

- A meaningful job at a living wage;
- A secure and adequate income for those unable to work;
- Access to land;
- Access to capital;
- Ability for ordinary people to play a significant role in government.

The Campaign's demands included \$30 billion more for anti-poverty efforts and the annual construction of 500,000 more affordable homes. Campaigners did advocacy around a host of issues including police brutality, discrimination, agricultural policy (the favoring of corporate over small farms), health disparities, the right to unionize, and the rights of American Indians.

Fifty years later, in 2017, a group of civil rights leaders launched the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. This new campaign, co-chaired by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, is focused on poverty, racism, militarism, and ecological destruction, and will include forty days of action in state capitols around the nation. The campaign includes a national Truth Commission on the Right Not to Be Poor, which has spawned various statewide commissions, including the Truth Commission on Poverty in New York State, organized by the

The campaign includes a national Truth Commission on the Right Not to Be Poor.

Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State. This state effort has led to events in the Southern Tier, the Capital Region, and Long Island.

On January 25, 2018, the Commission held a hearing in Buffalo, at which local commissioners heard testimony from several dozen western New York residents about the region's poverty. That testimony was filmed and can be viewed at the YouTube channel of the Partnership for the Public Good. Quotations from the testimony are woven throughout this report, but we strongly urge the reader to view the full testimonies. One of the primary goals of the Truth Commissions is to uplift the voices of those directly impacted by poverty; and it is impossible to understand poverty without listening closely to those who have experienced it.

### The Scope of Poverty and Inequality in Buffalo-Niagara

The Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan region includes the roughly 1.1 million people who live in or near the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls – the fiftieth largest metropolitan statistical area in the nation. Over the last decade, the poverty rate in Buffalo-Niagara has stayed close to the average of New York State and of the United States: roughly 15 percent. In 2016, the region's poverty rate was 13.8 percent, lower than the state rate of 14.7 percent and the national rate of 14 percent.<sup>1</sup>

By national standards, then, the region is not unusually poor. It is, however, unusually unequal, in both spatial and racial terms. Compared to other regions, Buffalo-Niagara's poverty is more concentrated in its cities and among its people of color. In 2016 the poverty rate in the city of Buffalo, which has a population of roughly 260,000 people, was 30.5 percent – over twice the rate for the region as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Also in 2016, the region's poverty rate for African-Americans was 32.3 percent, while for whites it was only 9.3 percent.<sup>3</sup> Deep poverty is even more concentrated in the city. Of households with incomes below \$10,000, 48 percent live in the city of Buffalo.<sup>4</sup>



"Fifty years ago Martin Luther King, Jr. held a press conference in Atlanta to launch the Poor People's Campaign. Fifty years later in Buffalo, New York we held a Truth Commission on Poverty to help relaunch that campaign to ignite a "moral revival" to challenge systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and the nation's distorted priorities and values."  
- Franchelle Parker, Truth Commissioner

It is important to remember, however, that the region has far more suburbanites than urbanites, and far more whites than people of color. Thus, even though the *rates* of poverty are much higher for city-dwellers and people of color, there are roughly equal *numbers* of people living in poverty outside of the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls as there are inside them; and there are more whites living in poverty than people of color.

Living in poverty in a suburban or rural area comes with many distinctive disadvantages, particularly for people who lack a car or a reliable car and may face tremendous obstacles in accessing jobs, services, groceries, health care, and other basic amenities. But even worse are the disadvantages faced by those living in concentrated, racialized, segregated poverty in old urban neighborhoods. Buffalo-Niagara is the sixth most segregated major metropolitan region by race, and the seventh most segregated by income.<sup>5</sup> The overlapping of racial and economic segregation is a tremendous disadvantage for people of color. While only 14 percent of the region's white people live in areas of concentrated poverty, 64 percent of people of color do.<sup>6</sup> This double segregation heavily impacts education, employment, health, personal safety, and every other aspect of life.

### Measuring Poverty

In offering data about poverty thus far, we have been using the federal definition of the poverty line. In doing so, however, we are grossly understating the true scope of poverty. First, we should note that poverty statistics typically capture the number of people living in poverty at a given moment, but people are constantly moving in and out of poverty. Thus four out of every ten children experience at least one year of poverty before turning 18 (for white children, it's 30.1 percent; for black children, it's 75.4 percent).<sup>7</sup>

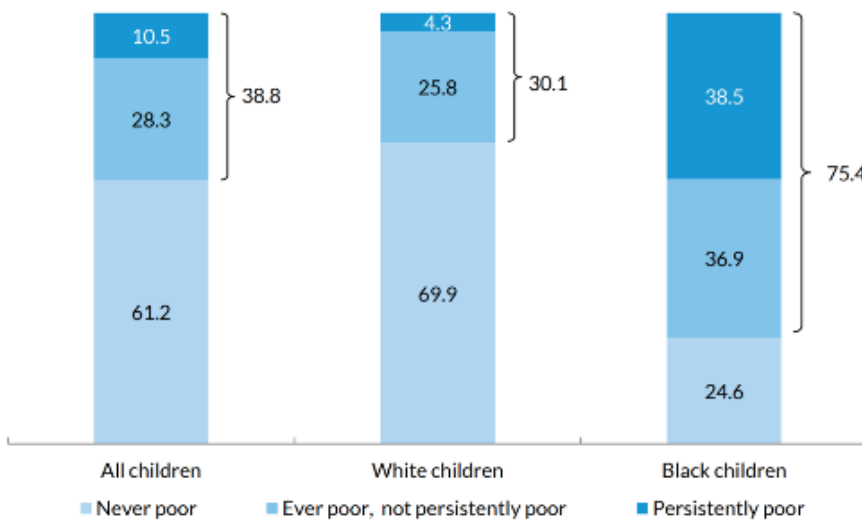


“We are here to reclaim our part in the sustainable renaissance not only for Buffalo but for communities throughout America. We are the more, the 99 percent and we are here to stay. We won't back up until we achieve a true democracy with justice and equality and opportunities for all, not only some.”

- Andrea Gonzalez,  
Truth Commissioner



Percentage of Childhood Poor, by Race



Source: Caroline Ratcliffe, “Child Poverty and Adult Success,” Urban Institute 2015.

Second, most experts consider the federal poverty line artificially low. The current federal poverty level is \$23,550 a year for a family of four and \$19,530 for a family of three. But, depending on where the family lives, it needs roughly two to three times that amount to meet basic living expenses. The United Way’s ALICE Project calculates that 44 percent of households in New York State cannot afford even a basic “household survival budget.”<sup>8</sup> A household with two adults, one infant, and one preschooler in New York State needs an income of over \$62,000 just to meet its “survival budget.”<sup>9</sup>

Another way to think about poverty is to ask whether a household qualifies for public assistance to help them meet basic expenses. In New York State, a household of four qualifies for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) if its income is less than \$53,484 per year.<sup>10</sup> Many would say that if you need public assistance to pay your utility bills, you are experiencing poverty.



“I am a mom of three, and I cannot afford to provide for my children. I cannot afford to provide for my children the way I would like to and give them a life outside of poverty. I have trouble paying for their school supplies during the school year and I have to have my mom help me with that almost every school year and I cannot afford to place my kids in extracurricular activities that they are interested in because I do not have enough money.”

- Sara, Testifier

## What Causes Poverty

In understanding poverty's causes, it matters greatly whether we are comparing individuals, groups, or societies. When comparing individuals, factors such as luck and effort play a great role. But when comparing groups or societies, the explanations lie in the public policy choices that different societies have made over time. Put simply, people experience poverty when their incomes are too low and their expenses are too high. The roots of poverty are public policies that affect incomes and expenses.

Those public policies have intergenerational affects, because growing up poor makes it far more likely that you will be poor as an adult. In the United States, this dynamic has worsened as economic mobility has decreased and economic inequality has increased. Of children born in 1940, 92 percent earned more than their parents; of children born in 1984, that rate had fallen to only 50 percent.<sup>11</sup> 42 percent of American men who grow up in the bottom fifth of incomes are still in the bottom fifth as adults. This disadvantage is much higher than in Denmark (25 percent) or Great Britain (30 percent). Only 8 percent of American men at the bottom rose to the top fifth, compared with 12 percent of the British and 14 percent of the Danes.<sup>12</sup>

We turn now to a brief discussion of how public policies affect the “building blocks” of poverty: low incomes, due to inadequate wages and public assistance, and high expenses for basic living costs such as housing, food, childcare, and transportation.

### Income

#### WAGES

A crucial cause of poverty is jobs that do not pay enough. Roughly one-third of the local work force is in service jobs with a median income below \$26,000. Some of the most common low-wage jobs in Western New York are listed below (figures are from the first quarter of 2016).<sup>13</sup>



“I do not think it is possible to understand poverty and its related ramifications without some basic analysis of class.”

- Richard Lipsitz,  
Truth Commissioner

Occupation	Number Employed	Median Income
Food Preparation/Serving	61,210	\$19,960
Retail Salesperson	24,200	\$20,320
Cashier	17,160	\$19,470
Janitor/Cleaner	12,700	\$24,510
Stock Clerk/Order Filler	9,140	\$22,450
Personal Care Aides	9,090	\$23,640
Teacher’s Assistant	8,810	\$22,310
Hand Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers	8,690	\$25,550
Home Health Aide	5,640	\$23,770

Buffalo-Niagara, even more than the rest of the nation, has seen a replacement of manufacturing jobs with lower-paying, less secure service industry jobs, resulting in a large migration of people from the lower middle class to low income working poor. Not only do these new jobs pay low wages, but they also often fail to offer enough hours, and enough hours on a regular schedule, to keep a family out of poverty.

Many public policies affect wages, hours, and job quality, but the most important are those concerning labor unions and minimum wages. Unions raise wages not only for their members, through collective bargaining, but for entire sectors, through ripple effects, and for entire societies, through their advocacy for worker-friendly policies.<sup>14</sup> Higher minimum wages also have a ripple effect beyond the lowest paid workers.

**PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

For those temporarily or permanently unable to work, the key determinant of income will be public programs such as unemployment insurance, workers compensation, disability insurance, temporary assistance to needy families (TANF), etc.: what



“I knew we were not getting paid a lot, but I was a teenager so at the time it was okay. But now I have two kids and it is difficult living pay check to check, it is not enough. We took half of the Wendy’s employees on strike and since then we have been getting a dollar increase ever year, but it is still not enough because \$15 is bare minimum.”

- Khalil, Testifier

are their eligibility criteria and how generous are their benefits.

One major cause of poverty is the inadequate public assistance for people who are disabled. Nationally, of people from 18 to 64 years of age, 31.2 percent of those with a disability were living in poverty in 2015, compared to 11.7 percent of those with no disability.<sup>15</sup> For those with a permanent disability that makes them completely unable to work, the federal program is Supplemental Security Income (SSI). In 2017, the annual SSI payment for a single person was \$8,831, while the federal poverty line was \$12,060.<sup>16</sup> In other words, it is national policy that permanently disabled people should live in poverty. This issue is of particular importance to Buffalo-Niagara. According to 2015 Census figures, 13.2 percent of Buffalo-Niagara residents and 16.5 percent of city of Buffalo residents have a disability, compared to a national average of 12.4 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly inadequate is the aid provided by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the basic welfare program for families that replaced AFDC in 1996. Even before TANF, AFDC benefits had declined greatly. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Between 1970 and 1996, AFDC benefits fell by more than 20 percent in every state but one and by more than 40 percent in two-thirds of the states, after adjusting for inflation.” Since 1996 the downward slide has continued, with benefits falling by at least 20 percent in 35 states.<sup>18</sup> Even more important, federal and state governments have curtailed eligibility drastically. In 1996, 68 percent of families in poverty received TANF; in 2015, only 23 percent did.<sup>19</sup> Partly as a result, the number of children in the U.S. living in extreme poverty (less than \$2 per day in household income) doubled from 1.4 million to 2.8 million between 1996 and 2011.<sup>20</sup>

## Expenses

### HOUSING

Housing is the biggest cost for the average household, especially for people with low incomes. Housing costs for people with low incomes rose over 50 percent from 1996 to 2014, and people with low



“I have a learning disability which kind of hinders me from getting a good job, so I have to depend on social security disability, Medicaid and Medicare and a lot of people say ‘you’re a burden on society.’ Now, Medicaid gave me a letter two days before Christmas and says I am making \$74 dollars too much in my job. So, I am only allowed to make \$349 a month or I lose benefits.”

- Marie, Testifier

incomes now spend over 40 percent of their income toward rent.<sup>21</sup> More than half of Buffalo households (55 percent) cannot afford their rent – according to the federal definition by which affordability means paying less than 30 percent of income toward gross rent, which includes utilities. As of 2010, 23 percent of the city’s households had severe housing cost burdens, paying more than 50 percent of their income on housing. Among black households, over 30 percent faced severe burdens; among Hispanic households, over 37 percent did.<sup>22</sup>

The federal government spends roughly \$190 billion per year on housing, but most of that money goes to high-income homeowners, not to people experiencing poverty. Due to subsidies such as the mortgage interest and property tax deductions, the government spends \$85.4 billion on households with income over \$100,000, but only \$34.6 billion on households with incomes under \$30,000.<sup>23</sup> The federal programs for low-income renters, such as public housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, and Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance, reach only about one in four low-income households who qualify for aid.<sup>24</sup>

#### FOOD

Food is another major cost for people with low incomes. In Western New York, over 13 percent of the population is food insecure, and over 20 percent of children are.<sup>25</sup> The federal program to reduce food costs is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which reaches over 45 million people. But the average SNAP benefit is just \$126.39 a month,<sup>26</sup> while the United Way’s Household Survival Budget for 2014 put monthly food costs at \$202 for a single adult and \$612 for a family of four with an infant and a preschooler.<sup>27</sup> Thus, SNAP benefits are insufficient to cover many families’ nutritional needs.

#### CHILDCARE

Childcare is a critical cost for families. Families below the poverty line spend 30.1 percent of their income on childcare, and those



“I know what it is to ration food for a week or two at a time, so you can let your kids eat, I know what it is to let your kids not eat and go to bed. I know what it is to eat crackers, I have this love affair with bread. I have this love affair with bread because bread kept me alive. When I could not eat a lot of things I could buy a cheap loaf of bread and I could eat bread, and I am grateful.”

- Dennice, Testifier

between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty line spend 17.9 percent of their income on childcare.<sup>28</sup> In Erie County, the cost of center-based child care for one infant is \$12,792 per year, more than SUNY tuition.<sup>29</sup> The United States has the third-highest cost of childcare as measured by percentage of family income, compared to other developed nations. And yet the U.S. spends less than half of 1 percent of its federal budget on child care, while other developed countries spend anywhere from 2 percent to 7 percent.<sup>30</sup> As a result, only one out of six children eligible for federally funded childcare assistance actually receives it.<sup>31</sup>

#### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation costs have a major impact on people living in poverty. From 2010 to 2014 the share of income that people in the bottom third of incomes spent on transportation increased from 9 percent to 14 percent, even as transportation spending remained stable among higher income groups (11 percent of income for those in the middle, and 8 percent of income for those in the top third).<sup>32</sup> Whereas in 1996, lower income households spent an average of \$2,000 per year on the combined costs of fuel, auto insurance, vehicle maintenance, and public transit, by 2014 they were spending nearly \$2,100 per year just on fuel.<sup>33</sup> The high cost of transit in the United States is driven by policies that have rewarded sprawl and funded automobile travel instead of public transit.

In Buffalo-Niagara, the impact of federal and state policies incentivizing sprawl has been grievous. Rolf Pendall has aptly summarized Buffalo's development pattern as "sprawl without growth." Between 1950 and 2000, the region gained only 80,881 people, but the urbanized area nearly tripled, going from 123 square miles to 367 square miles. Even as the region's population started to fall, the rapid sprawl continued. From 1980 until 2006, when the region's population was declining by 5.8 percent, the urbanized area grew 38 percent.<sup>34</sup>



"I have worked in the healthcare field since 1994. As a homecare worker, I must put in 50 hours a week just to get paid for 32 hours. I am away from home most of the time and I rely on the metro buses to get me to client to client. Right now, one of my clients have been in the hospital, and while he is there, I lose hours. I don't get sick time or vacation time."

- Ursula, Testifier

As public transportation has failed to keep up with the geographic spread of development, residents without reliable cars often struggle to find and keep jobs. Over 56,700 households in the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan area do not own a vehicle.<sup>35</sup> Approximately 67 percent of these households are low-income. More than 2,000 of these carless households have no access to public transportation.<sup>36</sup> Crucially, almost 58 percent of jobs in the region are beyond the reach of transit networks.<sup>37</sup>

In most census tracts on the east and west sides of Buffalo, more than 33 percent of households lack a vehicle.<sup>38</sup> In a number of tracts, more than 43 percent of households lack a vehicle.<sup>39</sup> Rates of public transit usage vary dramatically by race as well as income. Overall, in the city of Buffalo, 21 percent of black, 15 percent of Hispanic, and 26 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander workers commute by transit, compared to only 5 percent of whites.<sup>40</sup>

In many nations, public transit is viewed as a vital amenity for the whole community. In most parts of the United States, however, public transit is viewed as second-class transportation for people with low incomes. For that reason, it does not attract the kind of political support that would translate into adequate funding, and so it tends to be grossly underfunded – which creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which people with choices tend not to use it and ridership levels remain low.

Federal and state governments spend vastly more on roads and highways than they do on public transit, even though automobile travel imposes drastically more costs on the public through pollution, accidents, traffic congestion. Motor vehicles cause over 40,000 accidental deaths and almost 3 million injuries per year, and over 50,000 additional people are killed each year by air pollution from vehicles, with pollution-linked diseases disproportionately hurting people with low incomes and people of color in dense, urban neighborhoods.<sup>41</sup>



“It is unacceptable that people have to commute over 50 hours on public transit to get to their places of employment due to the disinvestment in public transit.

It is unacceptable that low-income children and elders, the most vulnerable members of our families, are overwhelmingly more likely to live, work, and play in highly polluted areas.

- Andrea Gonzalez,  
Truth Commissioner

## The Impacts of Poverty

Poverty has impacts in every aspect of a person's life and every aspect of a community's well-being. Here, we focus on just four areas: health, housing, education, and criminal justice.

### Health

In the United States, socioeconomic status is the most powerful predictor of disease and mortality. A study by MIT found that the wealthiest 1 percent of men in the United States live almost 15 years longer than the poorest 1 percent of men.<sup>42</sup> The economic differences are compounded by racial ones. In Buffalo, for example, the life expectancy of African-Americans is over five years shorter than that of whites.<sup>43</sup>

Poverty influences the rates of countless diseases. To give just two examples, people with low-incomes have a 50 percent greater risk of heart disease and a 50 percent greater risk of type 2 diabetes.<sup>44</sup> Many of these health problems and diseases can be linked to a lack of treatment or healthcare. In the city of Buffalo, 7.2 percent of persons live without health insurance,<sup>45</sup> and many who do have insurance face high premiums, prescription drug costs, and co-pays, which discourage them from using healthcare. In addition those without cars find it difficult to travel to healthcare sites. People with unstable work schedules find it harder to arrange non-emergency medical care such as routine checkups and preventative care for both the child and the parent. As a result, higher income individuals are more likely to visit a doctor's office, while those with low incomes visit a clinic, hospital, or lack healthcare altogether. In five zip codes of Buffalo's east side, hospital admissions are *triple* those of neighborhoods with predominantly higher income residents.<sup>46</sup>



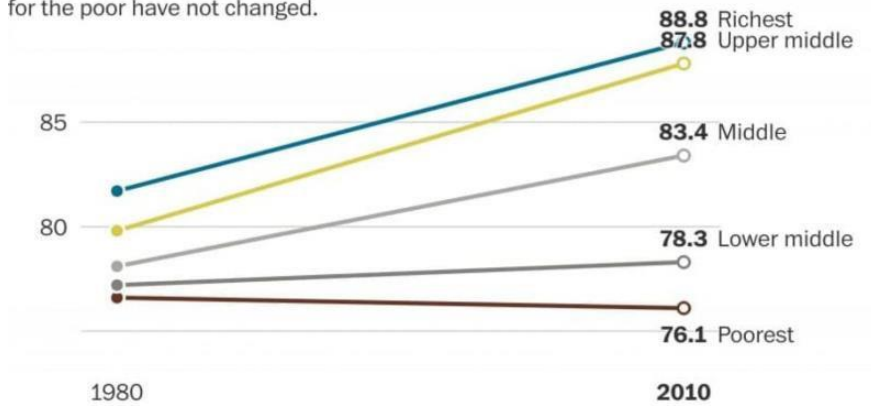
"I have the luxury of making my paycheck magically disappear straight from payroll...into huge insurance companies. Half my paycheck goes into insulin pumps and the other half goes to gas."

- Andrew, Testifier



### Inequality in life expectancy widens for men

Wealthier men can expect to live longer than their parents did, while life expectancies for the poor have not changed.



Life expectancy for 50-year-olds in a given year, by quintile of income over the previous 10 years

Source: National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine

### NUTRITION

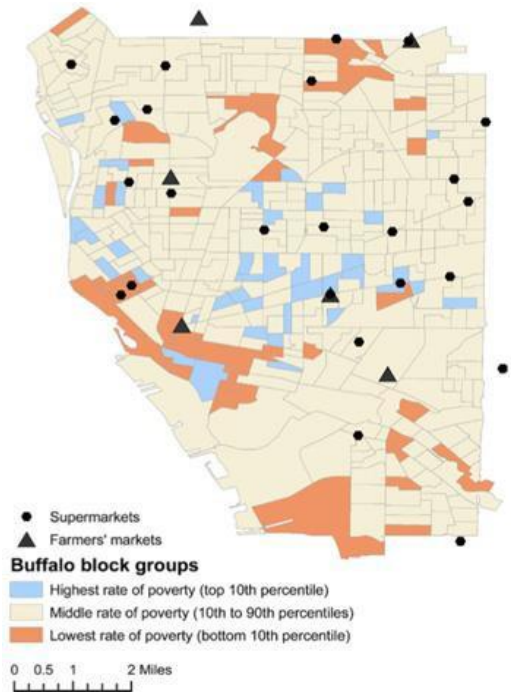
Food insecurity is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. In the United States, more than 42 million Americans, including 13 million children, are food insecure.<sup>47</sup> Poor nutrition leads to a host of health problems among those living in poverty, including both hunger and obesity. The hunger arises from food insecurity, while the obesity results in part from the cheapness of unhealthy foods. Families may sacrifice health in order purchase a larger quantity of foods or more accessible foods. In the United States, 36 percent of people are overweight, and in Buffalo the rate is 38 percent, with higher rates among African-Americans.<sup>48</sup>

Food deserts, which are areas that lack access to a grocery store providing fresh and healthy foods, also contribute to the obesity and hunger problems. Limited access to transportation makes it difficult for people in poverty to travel to grocery stores. However, most neighborhoods have a local corner store that accepts SNAP benefits.



“If a person is in college or trade school they should be able to still qualify for food stamps or other public assistance if their income qualifies them. Public assistance eligibility thresholds create systemic pit falls, or ‘benefit cliffs,’ that make it extremely difficult to ever escape the cycle of poverty. To break these cycles, we need better ways to transition people off or public assistance.”  
 - Franchelle Parker, Truth Commissioner

LOCATIONS OF FARMERS’ MARKETS AND SUPERMARKETS, WITH LEVELS OF HOUSEHOLD POVERTY IN BUFFALO NY



Source: M.J. Widener, S.S. Metcalf, and Y. Bar- Yam, "Dynamic Urban Food Environments: A Temporal Analysis of Access to Healthy Foods," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 41(4) 439-441, 2011.

Food prices are high at these stores and selection limited. SNAP benefits will not stretch as far in food deserts because of the inflated prices. Corner stores do not provide the same healthy and fresh options as a regular grocery store, furthering limiting a family’s food choices. Most of Buffalo’s food deserts are located on the east side, and Buffalo’s African-American residents are six times more likely than whites to live in a neighborhood without access to a grocery store.<sup>49</sup>

LEAD POISONING

In the United States, over three million children have lead poisoning, with low-income families eight times more susceptible than those with higher incomes.<sup>50</sup> Lead poisoning is an environmental disease, its most common source being lead-based paint used in residential houses up until the 1970s. Children are prone to the detrimental side effects of lead poisoning because their



“A few of the testimonies included individuals who believed their poverty was due to decisions that they made rather than oppressive problematic systems. There was also one participant who felt that his employer was basically a good person even though he was resistant to having a union established at his company and to his employees being paid a living wage and having basic rights.”

- Rev. Gerard Williams, Truth Commissioner

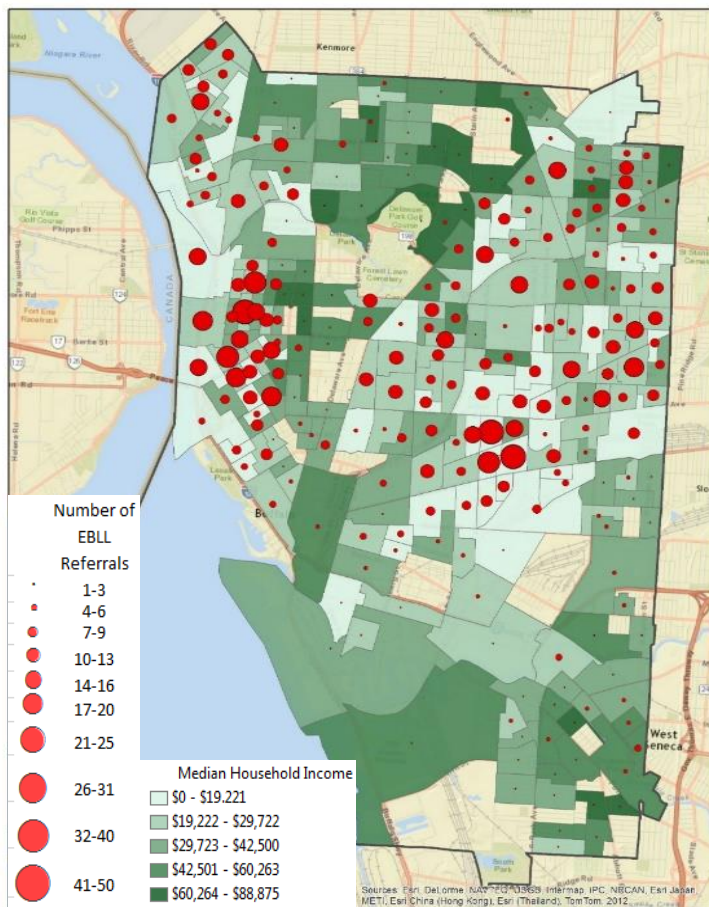
younger, undeveloped, bodies make them more likely to absorb lead when exposed to it. Even a slightly elevated level of lead in the blood can lead to cognitive and development problems for children.

Buffalo has the oldest housing stock in the nation, with the largest percentage (67 percent) of homes built before 1940.<sup>51</sup> As many of these homes were built well before the use of lead in paint was banned, Buffalo suffers from higher than average lead poisoning levels. Currently, the CDC’s recommended “action” level is 5 ug/dL of lead in the blood, and New York defines “elevated lead levels” as a blood lead level greater than or equal to 10 ug/dL. In 2017 Erie County reported 290 new cases of blood lead level over 10 and 466 cases in the 5 to 10 range.<sup>52</sup>



“I am not poor, I am not impoverished, I just don’t have money. The three richest people in this country Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffet, and Bill Gates, have as much money as the bottom half of this country which is about 160,000,000 million people. The top 42 richest people in the world have more wealth than the bottom half of the planet. That is over 3 billion people... I am not radical, I just want justice!”

- Heron, Testifier



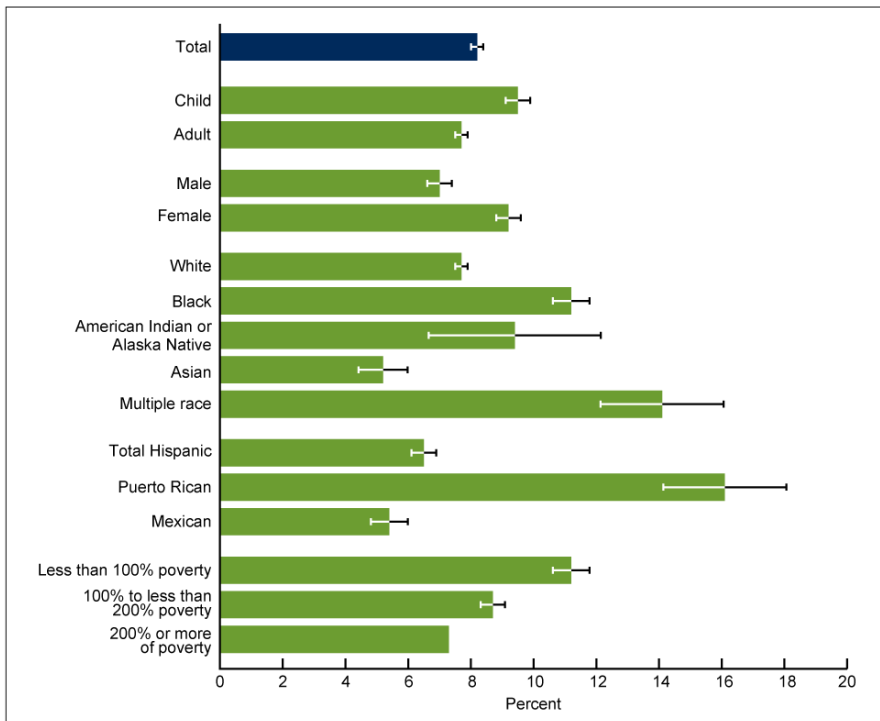
Source: "Renewing Our Pledge: A Path to Ending Lead Poisoning of Buffalo's Most Vulnerable Citizens," CGR, Inc., 2017.

The lead-poisoned children most often live in deteriorated, old rental housing, especially duplexes, in the high-poverty neighborhoods on Buffalo’s east and west sides.<sup>53</sup>

ASTHMA

In the United States, 21.8 million people have asthma, including 7 million children under the age of 18.<sup>54</sup> In a single year, asthma causes 3,615 deaths and 2 million emergency room visits.<sup>55</sup> As seen in the chart below, over 11 percent of people living in poverty have asthma, compared to less than 8 percent of people living at least 200 percent over the poverty line. Asthma symptoms are often triggered by bad air quality and poor housing conditions, which correlate strongly with poverty. As of 2007, roughly 20 percent of people with asthma in the United States suffered from dampness and mold exposures in their homes.<sup>56</sup>

ASTHMA PREVALENCE BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS, 2008 - 2010

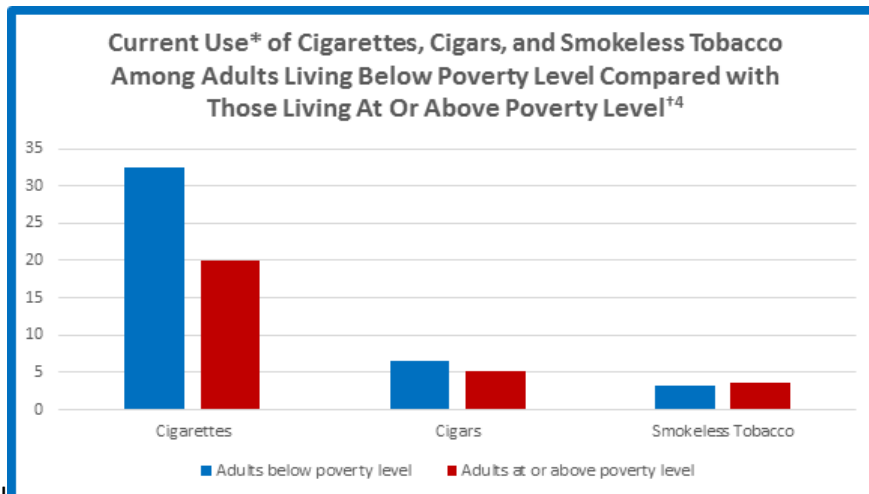


Source: CDC/NCHS, Health Data Interactive and National Health Interview Survey.

Approximately 11 percent of adults in Erie County suffer from asthma, and the county has some of the highest asthma rates in the country for children under 17.<sup>57</sup> As with lead poisoning rates, asthma rates are significantly higher in the low-income neighborhoods on the east and west sides of Buffalo, where housing conditions are poor and air pollution levels are high, exacerbated by urban highways such as Route 33 and Route I-190 and by busy crossings such as the Peace Bridge.<sup>58</sup> On the west side, over 45 percent of residents report that at least one person in their household has a respiratory illness or asthma.<sup>59</sup>

SMOKING

Poverty gives rise to many stresses and unhealthy behaviors, which, coupled with limited healthcare access, can lead to long-term health problems. One unhealthy behavior, tobacco use, puts individuals at risk for a myriad of health issues. Nationally, only 15.5 percent of the population smokes, but the rate for those who live below the poverty line is over 25 percent.<sup>60</sup> In Erie County, 19.2 percent of the population reported smoking, with higher rates found in the city of Buffalo.<sup>61</sup> As a result, lung cancer is more prevalent in Erie County than in the state and country as a whole.<sup>62</sup>



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### WORK-RELATED HEALTH CONCERNS

Low-quality jobs have more potential hazards and practices that can lead to serious injury, with financial consequences for both the employee and the employer. A recent study found that working a low-quality job was even worse for a person's health than being unemployed.<sup>63</sup>

Low-quality jobs such as mining and sandblasting carry increased physical dangers such as exposure to asbestos, which causes lung cancer.<sup>64</sup> Similar conditions endanger painters, construction laborers and maintenance workers.<sup>65</sup> Low-quality jobs also have a high rate of slips, trips, falls, overexertion, and a high probability of being struck by an object.<sup>66</sup> Twelve out of the 25 most dangerous jobs in America, based on fatality rate and total amount of injuries, pay less than \$40,000 a year.<sup>67 68</sup>

A recent survey of over 200 workers in Buffalo found that 56 percent of them reported at least one potential health and safety violation by their employer.<sup>69</sup>

Only 20 percent of workers in low-wage jobs have access to paid sick days, compared to 87 percent of those in high income jobs; thus low-wage workers often must take unpaid sick days and earn even less income.<sup>70</sup> Without sufficient sick days low-wage workers often go to work sick for fear of losing their jobs or losing pay which can lead to spread of contagious disease and a worsening health condition for the employee.

### MENTAL HEALTH

Poverty can cause mental health problems, exacerbate their symptoms, and block access to effective treatment. In May of 2015, the National Center for Health published findings from 2009 to 2013 regarding American adults suffering from psychological distress. 8.7 percent of adults with income below the federal poverty level experienced serious psychological distress, compared with only 1.2 percent of those with incomes of at least 400 percent of the poverty level.<sup>71</sup> A 2005 study of 34,000 individuals who were

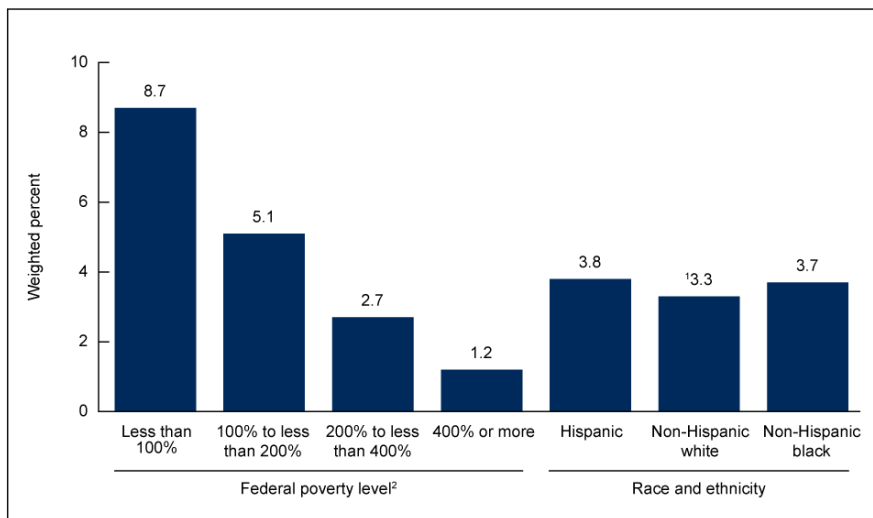


“Approximately half of the testimonies came from women expressing issues connected with their gender identity; meaning sexist and misogynistic problems from both employers and co-workers...all of the women felt powerless to confront these issues for fear of losing their job, which often was a minimum wage position.”

- Rev. Gerard Williams, Truth Commissioner

hospitalized in psychiatric units at least twice within the past seven years also revealed a strong correlation between poor socioeconomic conditions and risk of psychiatric illness and hospitalization.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, children and adults experiencing poverty face higher risks of suffering from trauma.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, those struggling to live in poverty are very often unsuccessful at accessing mental health resources.<sup>74</sup>

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITH SERIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS, BY INCOME RELATIVE TO FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL AND BY RACE, 2009-2013



Source: CDC/NCHS, National Health Interview Survey, 2009-2013.

Poverty increases mental health risks, and mental health problems exacerbate poverty. Those afflicted with mental health conditions often face higher health care costs, reduced levels of productivity, lower overall health levels, and extreme hunger, which all contribute to those individuals remaining in poverty.<sup>75</sup> One study discovered the odds of a family suffering from food insecurity increased by fifty to eighty percent if the mother experienced moderate to severe depression.<sup>76</sup> Research suggests that families struggling in deep poverty frequently fail to access public benefits for which they are eligible, such as SNAP and TANF. Mental health problems also correlate strongly to homelessness. Approximately forty-five percent of homeless individuals experience some form of mental illness, and roughly twenty-five percent have experienced severe mental illness.<sup>77</sup>

## Housing

### REPAIR PROBLEMS

Because of poverty, many people live in substandard housing and blighted neighborhoods. Earlier in this report, we highlighted the way that housing conditions cause lead poisoning and exacerbate asthma symptoms. Repair problems cause many other problems, as well. Nationally, approximately 13.5 million injuries occur annually in and around the home due to repair needs that are not addressed.<sup>78</sup> Sometimes, repair problems lead to fires, and roughly 2,900 people each year die from house fires.<sup>79</sup>

Along with physical injuries caused by neglecting to repair old homes, there can also be psychological effects as well. In 1999, it was estimated that approximately 11 million homes had interior leaks, and 14 million homes had exterior leaks.<sup>80</sup> Not only do damp homes provide a nurturing environment for mites, roaches, respiratory viruses, and mold, all of which play a role in respiratory diseases, but damp, moldy and cold indoor conditions have also been associated with anxiety and depression.<sup>81</sup>

### ENERGY INEFFICIENCY

Throughout the U.S., poor households live in less energy efficient homes and allocate a greater percentage of their household income to energy purchases.<sup>82</sup> Even more shocking is that one in four families spend 70 percent of their income on rent and electricity alone.<sup>83</sup> This is a problem that is only growing worse, as electricity costs have increased over 50 percent since 2000.<sup>84</sup>

In 2009, between ten and fifteen million households contended with potential shut-offs from their electric and natural gas services.<sup>85</sup> Although services like Low-Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP) can help alleviate some of these problems, they were only able to help a portion (6.8 million) of these households that faced the very real threat of having their heat turned off.<sup>86</sup>

One reason for energy inefficiency is the fact that 79 percent of tenants pay for their own utilities.<sup>87</sup> Thus, few landlords have

Year Housing Structure Built	
City	1969 or earlier
Buffalo	90.3%
Detroit	89.8%
Cleveland	87.4%
St. Louis	84.4%
Pittsburgh	83.0%
Milwaukee	81.7%
Cincinnati	80.1%
Chicago	77.1%
Toledo	76.1%
Twin Cities	73.9%
Kansas City	59.0%
Omaha	56.8%
Ft. Wayne	53.4%
Indianapolis	52.2%
Columbus	44.4%



“I want to talk to you about the job I just had. For every sick day, personal day, holiday, office closing, all of this was taking away from the mortgage that I was helping my mom with.”

- Victoria, Testifier

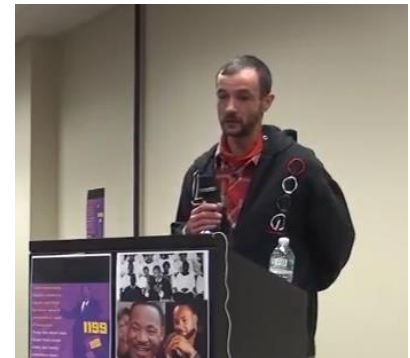


incentives to upgrade to energy-efficient heating or cooling systems.<sup>24</sup> This problem is even more pressing in Buffalo, where, according to the 2010 Census, 59.3 percent of homes were renter occupied (compared with 34.9 percent nationally),<sup>88</sup> and where energy costs are already 30 percent above the national average.<sup>89</sup> Incredibly, for people living at 50 percent of the poverty line or below in Erie County, energy costs represent 76.6 percent of household income.<sup>90</sup> This energy efficiency is also an environmental crisis, as residential buildings are Buffalo's greatest source of greenhouse emissions (34 percent).<sup>91</sup>

#### INVOLUNTARY MOVES AND HOMELESSNESS

Tenants with low incomes are often forced to move – because they cannot afford the rent, because a landlord has failed to make necessary repairs, or other reasons. These forced moves have an extremely negative impact on student achievement, as it is estimated that children who move three or more times have rates of school dropout that are nearly 1/3 of a standard deviation higher than those who are school stable.<sup>92</sup> In addition, mobile students experience a three to four month learning deficiency as compared to stable peers.<sup>93</sup> Not only does involuntary movement affect student achievement, but adults lose ground in their professional lives as well. The likelihood of a job loss increases between 11 and 22 percentage points for workers who experience a forced move.<sup>94</sup> Even if they find new work, displaced workers who start new jobs earn roughly 17 percent less than they would have had they been continuously employed.<sup>95</sup>

As over 41 percent of Buffalo households in 2010 experienced a household problem, such as unaffordability, overcrowding, or substandard housing, and over 25 percent experience a severe housing problem,<sup>96</sup> Buffalo residents are at an extreme risk of forced movement based on reasons beyond their control. The most extreme version of an involuntary move is homelessness. In Erie County, an estimated 5,455 people experienced homelessness in 2015. In 2016, that number rose almost ten percent to 5,953.<sup>97</sup>



“I basically allowed my employer to walk over me for the last two years. Wage theft, every week... Poverty is degrading, it brings you down... I've been through worse than what my boss puts me through, but it's still not right.”

- Travis, Testifier

Homelessness drastically impacts children’s educational development. A New York State report on children in grades 3 to 8 during the 2015-16 school year reported that, in Buffalo, 16 percent of students, or more than 1,900 children had experienced homelessness since enrolling in public school. Statewide, the typical student who was homeless was half as likely to be proficient in English Language Arts assessments.<sup>98</sup>

## Education

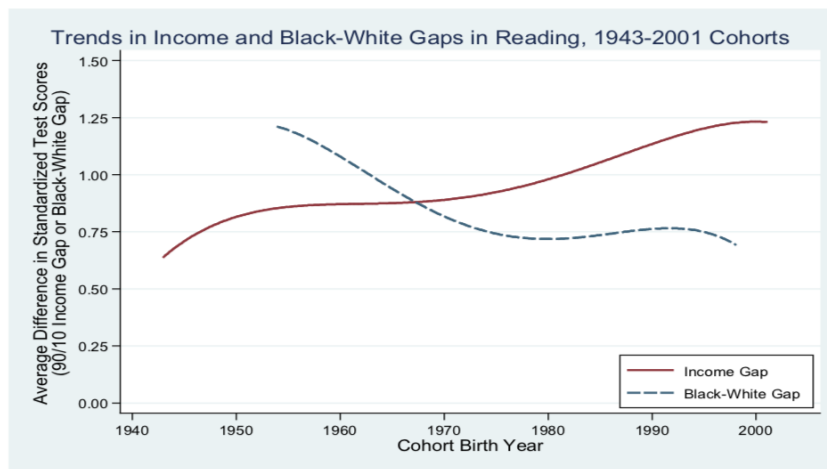
In the United States, family income is the most powerful predictor of academic achievement. Students in the bottom 20 percent of family incomes are five times more likely to drop out of high school than those in the top 20 percent of all family incomes.<sup>99</sup>

Poverty’s impacts on education begin even before birth and become dramatically evident well before kindergarten. Eight-five percent of a child’s brain development happens by the age of five, and as much as half of school failure may arise from gaps in early care and development prior to entering school.<sup>100</sup> One of the most noticeable effects of poverty is on the vocabulary of students. In 1996, Hart and Risley conducted a survey revealing that “by the age of four, children from poor households hear 32 million fewer spoken words than their better-off peers.”<sup>101</sup>

Those disadvantages are compounded in K through 12 education. As evidenced in the chart below, since 1940, the impacts of income on standardized test scores have grown dramatically. This national trend is clearly reflected in Western New York, where standardized test scores and graduation rates correlate remarkably closely with the percentage of children with low incomes. In the Buffalo Public Schools, which consistently fall to the bottom of the rankings, roughly 80 percent of students are poor. A 2015 report by PPG found that 73.9 percent of the variation in test scores between different schools in Western New York could be explained by the difference in their poverty populations.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, beyond lower incomes, lower job quality also has a

negative impact on children's education. Research has shown that children with parents who have unstable work schedules, as are common in low-quality job sectors such as retail and service, demonstrate lower cognitive performance, perception, memory, learning problem solving and verbal communication.<sup>103</sup> These children also show worse behavior and mental health.<sup>104</sup>



Source: Simplified version of graph In Sean Reardon, ch. 5 In G. Duncan and R. Murnane, *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality and the Uncertain Life Chances of Low Income Children*, 2011.

Poverty greatly reduces a child's chances of going to college. From the bottom third of the income distribution, only 14 percent of children will complete four-year degrees.<sup>105</sup> One crucial barrier is cost. Even where a student qualifies for financial aid to help with tuition, he or she may not be able to afford college. College tuition only accounts for 20 percent of the student's total costs. Food, housing, books, and supplies account for the other 80 percent.<sup>106</sup> Low-income students who start college often have trouble staying in it due to financial problems. A national study found that 12 percent of community college students experienced homelessness, and 42 percent were food insecure.<sup>107</sup>

Some lower income students may pursue two-year degrees and technical education (CTE) programs. High-quality CTE Programs, or career and technical education programs, show promising results

when engaging students and helping them succeed academically. However, in some instances, for-profit colleges, trade schools, and certificate programs exploit vulnerable students into enrolling, paying tuition, and yet leaving the program without viable job prospects. They tend to recruit the poorest of students, as they are most vulnerable, and these students are left with crippling debt.<sup>108</sup>

## Criminal Justice

### VICTIMIZATION

People living in poverty are more likely to be victims of crime than those with higher incomes.<sup>109</sup> National data from 2008 to 2012 show that people living at or under the federal poverty level are twice as likely as those with high incomes to experience violent crime, including rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.<sup>110</sup>

Research also suggests that neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty and inequality and lower levels of homeownership have higher levels of crime.<sup>111</sup> The city of Buffalo suffers from extreme concentrated poverty, income inequality, and a lower rate of homeownership (40 percent) than the national average (64 percent).<sup>112</sup> In 2016 among major cities, Buffalo was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> for violent crimes, with 1,119 violent crimes per 100,000 residents.<sup>113</sup> In 2017, at least three quarters of homicides reported by the Buffalo Police Department occurred on Buffalo's east side,<sup>114</sup> home to several of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods.<sup>115</sup>

In addition to living in neighborhoods with high crime rates, people with very low incomes are particularly susceptible to victimization by white-collar criminals, including employers, predatory lenders, and landlords. Wage theft, including unlawful paystub deductions, and violations involving minimum wage, tipped minimum wage, overtime, off-the-clock work, meal breaks, and employee misclassification, disproportionately affects low-wage workers.<sup>116</sup> In the ten most populous states, including New York, an estimated 2.4 million workers lost \$8 billion annually due to minimum wage



“A few testimonies spoke of a deliberate ‘criminalizing’ of the poor. Even our military veterans expressed a lack of access to information and opportunity. Overall, the stories of the evening indicated that as a country we could do far better toward our most important citizens; women, children, veterans and the disabled.

- Rev. Gerard Williams, Truth Commissioner

violations; losses affect about 17 percent of low-wage workers and account for nearly a quarter of their earned wages.<sup>117</sup> A recent survey of over 200 workers in Buffalo found that 58.9 percent of them reported at least one wage and hour violation.

In terms of housing, many low-income people are disadvantaged by unlawful or exploitative landlord practices. Although landlords can lawfully retain a tenant's security deposit for unpaid rent or damages, around a quarter of renters in an online survey report that their security deposits were kept unlawfully.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, many landlords do not uphold the laws requiring housing to be kept in good repair, which courts typically fail to enforce.<sup>119</sup> Low-income tenants often lack legal representation to challenge these practices.<sup>120</sup>

Predatory and unlawful lending industries, including mortgage lenders and consumer finance industries, target low-income people whose poor credit precludes them from utilizing other services.<sup>121</sup> This often results in a continuous cycle of financial hardship for low-income individuals. To give just one example, despite the prohibition on payday loans in New York State, an investigation by the Department of Financial Services in 2013 found that 35 out-of-state lenders, who operate online, were charging New Yorkers illegal rates for short-term loans.<sup>122</sup> These payday loans often charged interest of 100 to 650 percent interest, well beyond the 16 percent limit that applies to most lenders in New York State.<sup>123</sup>

#### ARRESTS

Studies indicate that children who grow up in poor households are significantly more likely to commit crimes.<sup>124</sup> In addition, due to the pervasive police presence in impoverished neighborhoods, racial bias, and other factors, people of color and people in poverty are also much more likely to be arrested for the same behaviors as whites and those not living in poverty. For example, although African-Americans use marijuana less than whites, between 2006 and 2015, African Americans in Buffalo were arrested seven times more than whites for marijuana possession.<sup>125</sup>

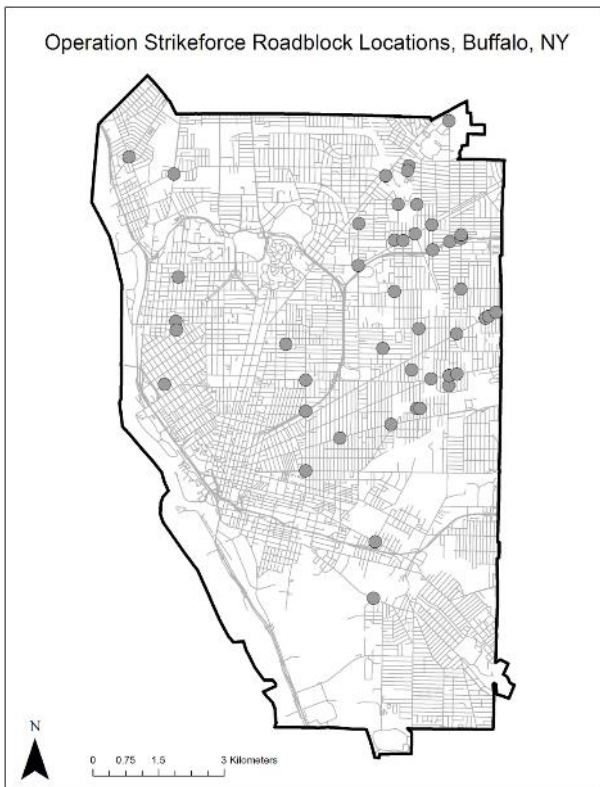


“That witch hunt of poverty, that criminalizes poverty. That witch hunt of poverty that wants to displace poverty. That witch hunt of poverty that wants to destroy communities. These things have been taking place within this city for decades, these things got to end.”

- J.K., Testifier

In certain impoverished communities, the role of the criminal justice system far exceeds that of any other social institution in the lives of residents.<sup>126</sup> Criminal justice involvement interrupts social and familial relationships, work, and educational opportunities.<sup>127</sup> Individuals subject to warrants or ongoing prosecutions live under stress of impending arrest or incarceration, and must often rely on others to help with daily needs, like driving a car.<sup>128</sup>

“Stop and frisk” refers to a police procedure where individuals are stopped on the street, questioned, and searched.<sup>129</sup> Legally, police can use this practice only when there is a reasonable suspicion a person is engaged in, or about to be engaged in, illegal activity.<sup>130</sup> Low-income people, particularly in communities of color, are more likely to interact with law enforcement during stop and frisk procedures.<sup>131</sup> This may be due to higher police presence in low-income communities, or the perception that people living in these communities lack the ability to challenge the practice.<sup>132</sup>



Source: Anjana Malhotra "Unchecked Authority without Accountability in Buffalo, New York," 2017.



“Through the lived experience of the testifiers, we saw how poverty is the common driver of challenges to justice and equity in Buffalo, from policing to gentrification. Just as these challenges are interrelated, so are their solutions. As Dr. King stressed, ‘When we work to remedy one evil, we affect all evils.’ At the Truth Commission, there was an insistence on the power of our cooperation and collective voice.”

- Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, Truth Commissioner

The Buffalo Police Department's Strike Force, recently disbanded,<sup>133</sup> focused its patrol for years in high-crime neighborhoods, and its 20 officers regularly conducted traffic checkpoints.<sup>134</sup> Roadblocks have been most common on Buffalo east and west sides, home to some of the city's poorest neighborhoods.<sup>135</sup>

The Buffalo Police Department's Housing Unit, which consists of 18 officers patrolling Buffalo's public housing projects,<sup>136</sup> wrote nearly 10,000 traffic, parking, and ordinance tickets in a recent 12-month period.<sup>137</sup> Public housing units in the city of Buffalo are almost 90 percent minority leased.<sup>138</sup>

Drug arrests account for a significant portion of individuals involved in the criminal justice system, and poor people face disproportionate arrests for drug offenses.<sup>139</sup> In 2016, there were 1,572,579 people arrested in the US for drug law violations; 1,249,025, or 84 percent, were for possession charges only.<sup>140</sup> Additionally, from 2010 to 2016, the average drug related arrests were over 1.5 million per year; over 80 percent of the drug-related arrests during those years were for possession only.<sup>141</sup>

#### INCARCERATION

The number of people in state and federal prisons rose from 187,914 in 1968 to 1,476,847 in 2015. The racial disparities in the prison population have grown steadily until, in 2015, 66 percent of those imprisoned were people of color.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, 731,000 people are held in local jails across the U.S. every day, and people go to jail 10.6 million times each year.<sup>143</sup> People in poverty are far more likely to be incarcerated than the general population, in part due to money bail that hurts poor defendants and defendants of color.

In an effective reversal of justice, money bail punishes poor defendants before their case is heard in court. The consequences of bail—and the needless incarceration it causes—ripple throughout the criminal justice system, causing vulnerable individuals to suffer and harming entire communities.

In 1976, the United States spent \$2.31 on the military for every dollar spent on anti-poverty programs. By 2016, that figure had risen to \$3.65 on the military for every anti-poverty dollar.

- *The Souls of Poor Folk*

Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics suggests that incarcerated people ages 27 to 42 earned an average of 41 percent less prior to incarceration compared to their non-incarcerated peers.<sup>144</sup> The racial disparities in incarceration are extreme. While 1 in 87 white men of working age are imprisoned, that figure is 1 in 36 for Hispanic men and 1 in 12 for African American men.<sup>145</sup>

Over half of incarcerated men and women have minor children, including over 120,000 mothers and 1.1 million fathers.<sup>146</sup> Prior to their incarceration, over 65 percent of male inmates worked, and over 50 percent were the primary financial support for their children.<sup>147</sup> About 2.7 million children in the US, or 1 in 28 children, have an incarcerated parent, and two thirds of those parents are behind bars for nonviolent offenses.<sup>148</sup> That number is one in nine for African American children, 1 in 28 for Hispanic children, and 1 in 57 for white children.<sup>149</sup>

#### COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

In addition to focusing disproportionately on people already in poverty, the criminal justice system also further impoverishes those that it affects. A study surveying hundreds of formerly incarcerated individuals and their families found incarcerated individuals had an average of \$13,607 in debt from court-related fines and fees.<sup>150</sup> Research suggests that incarceration leads to a 10 to 20 percent decrease in wages, along with a 30 percent decrease in wage growth over the life course of formerly incarcerated individuals.<sup>151</sup>

Individuals on probation or parole often have challenges including poverty, housing instability, substance abuse, mental illness, and unemployment.<sup>152</sup> Parolees are required to submit to strict supervision, including curfews, counseling, and drug tests; failure to comply with regulations puts parolees at risk for re-incarceration.<sup>153</sup> Although probation and parole are used in theory to avoid or decrease time spent incarcerated, in 2015, parolees in New York State were nearly as likely to be re-incarcerated as they were to complete their term on parole.<sup>154</sup> At the beginning of March 2018, nearly 1,200 people were on parole in the Buffalo metro area.<sup>155</sup>



Source: ACLU, Color of Change, "Selling Off Our Freedom," 2017.



People with a criminal record face a number of collateral consequences even if they have not served a prison sentence. In New York State, a criminal history can result in ineligibility for employment licenses and opportunities, and nationally, vast majorities of employers use criminal background checks.<sup>156</sup> People with criminal convictions may also be ineligible for public benefits, including food stamps, workers' compensation, veterans' benefits, and public housing.<sup>157</sup> Drug convictions alone account for over 200,000 people nationally losing eligibility for federal financial aid.<sup>158</sup>

## Solutions

As this report has detailed, poverty has devastating impacts on individuals, neighborhoods, and communities, which are compounded by racial inequality and other forms of social injustice. But poverty is not like a disease for whose cure we are searching. Poverty is caused by public policy choices and can be eliminated with public policy choices. The challenge is not so much to identify public policies that reduce poverty as to generate the political will to make those choices. Details may differ, but anti-poverty policies follow simple principles: raise people's incomes and reduce their expenses. To raise incomes for working people, enhance their right to organize and bargain collectively and raise minimum and living wage levels. To raise incomes for those unable to work, offer more generous public assistance programs. To reduce expenses, offer more public support to build and maintain affordable housing, to provide comprehensive public transportation, to offset the cost of quality childcare and preschool, etc.

At the federal level, nearly every effective anti-poverty policy is currently under direct attack and at risk of losing crucial funding and/or regulatory support. The key priority is to protect as best as possible labor rights, work supports, and public assistance programs and to resist the current administration's plans to further militarize the federal budget at the expense of human rights and human priorities. For a more specific set of federal policy priorities, we



"I have been fighting for a contract for our company. The company said they will lay off the workers February 9. I feel as though it is a scare tactic, intimidation, due to the fact that we want the contract, and this causes a lot of turmoil, physical abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse."

- Mark, Testifier

recommend *Everyone's Economy: 25 Policies to Lift Up Working People* from Demos.

At the state and local levels, there is more opportunity to improve policies rather than simply defending them. Rather than offering policy suggestions in a vacuum, we recommend supporting existing campaigns and advocacy efforts. Each year, over 275 community groups in the Partnership for the Public Good have the opportunity to craft and vote on a policy agenda for the coming year. PPG's 2018 Community Agenda addresses many of the themes of this report. Below is a brief summary of its planks:

### Housing

- The City of Buffalo should pass an inclusionary zoning law.
- The Erie County Industrial Development Agency should require developers to include an affordable housing component if they are applying for adaptive reuse subsidies.
- Erie County should pass a fair housing law that forbids discrimination by landlords based on source of income.

### Health

- The City of Buffalo and Erie County should implement the recommendations in the March 2018 action plan on lead poisoning ("Renewing Our Pledge").

### Transportation

- The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) should ensure that better access to public transit is available, especially where people with low incomes and people of color are concentrated.
- At least three voting members of the NFTA board of commissioners should be regular riders of public transportation.



"I would like to thank those who so bravely came forward to share their truth on how poverty has affected and infected their lives. My heart ached, as each one was sharing regarding poor housing conditions, lack of employment, healthcare, transportation, childcare, poor performing schools and low wages. Racism and sexism were major contributing factors heard in each of our presenters. Poverty is 100% curable and preventable!"

- Rev. Mark Blue,  
Truth Commissioner

- Erie County and New York State should increase budget allocations to ensure that the NFTA provides reliable and comprehensive bus service.
- The NFTA should mandate that its police officers undergo restorative justice training.
- The NFTA should phase in electric buses.

### Criminal Justice

- The Buffalo Police Department should require all officers to devote a certain number of hours each week to community policing activities, and create incentives for officers who do community policing well such as pay increases, promotions, and public recognition.
- The department should increase and improve training on diversity, implicit bias, de-escalation, and “alternatives to force.”
- Together with the City and Erie County District Attorney’s Office, the department should reduce arrests and racial disparities with alternative responses to low-level offenses, such as “fix-it tickets” and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD).
- New York State should pass the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) to legalize and regulate the use of marijuana; seal, reduce, or remove past convictions for crimes that MRTA eliminates; and allocate taxes collected from marijuana as follows: 25 percent to education, 25 percent to drug treatment programs, and 50 percent to fund community-based projects that redress harms caused by the War on Drugs.
- The City of Buffalo should designate marijuana the “lowest level enforcement priority” for the Buffalo Police Department and stop making arrests for low-level, simple possession of marijuana.

- The Erie County Legislature should pass legislation mirroring the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Bill, which would eliminate solitary confinement of vulnerable persons and limit solitary confinement to 15 consecutive days, or 20 out of any 60, among other reforms.

### Immigrants and Refugees

- Buffalo and Erie County should demonstrate their commitment to inclusion and diversity by becoming certified “Welcoming Communities.”
- The City and County should create comprehensive Language Access Plans that meet the standard set by Welcoming America and ensure that people with limited English proficiency have equal access to government services and civic participation.

### Disability Rights

The New York State Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) should work with state and local planning officials, the New York State Dormitory Authority, the NFTA, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health, voluntary service providers for people with disabilities, community members, and lawmakers to establish an accessible office of the OPWDD within the City of Buffalo.

### Access to Land and Capital

- The City of Buffalo should transfer over 200 City-owned vacant lots to the FB Community Land Trust for a nominal fee; require that all further developments in the Fruit Belt neighborhood be accompanied by legally enforceable community benefits agreements, negotiated by neighborhood leaders and residents; and fund and construct a community center in the Fruit Belt that includes an indoor

“Our true wealth is the highest value we have for each other. Collectively, we can ensure no one suffers the pain of poverty alone and encourage accountable leadership. We will lead in our perspective skills, abilities, and our uniqueness as a people to stand for better economic conditions regardless of our disability, past mistakes, and our background. We deserve an economic future that supports us, our family, and loved ones.”

- Afiya Rice, Truth Commissioner

gym, health equity center, commercial kitchen, and employment resource center.

- KeyBank and Northwest Bank should implement their commitments in Western New York to provide over \$1 billion in small business loans, mortgage loans, and home rehabilitation loans for low- to moderate-income borrowers; build new branches in underserved communities; improve language access at branches to extend services to those without English proficiency; fund meaningful local community development projects; create new banking products and services for those denied access to traditional checking accounts; and improve marketing and outreach to underserved communities.

In addition to these issues, there are a number of other active campaigns in New York State that have particular relevance to the issues raised in this report. They include the Campaign for New York Health, which would bring affordable, comprehensive care to every resident of the State; and the campaign to reform the use of money bail, which results in the incarceration, impoverishment, and exploitation of thousands of low-income New Yorkers every year. More generally, we urge the State to begin doing equality impact analyses of all proposed major legislation. Too many laws, even when neutral on their face, have brought devastating impacts on racial, economic, and other forms of inequality; it is time to put equality at the center of all public actions.

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## Conclusion

The solutions to poverty are not hidden or mysterious; they lie right before our eyes. The urgent challenge we face, the reason for the Poor People’s Campaign of 1968 and the Poor People’s Campaign of 2018, is to generate the political will to embrace them. As the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II has said, “This is about the moral center. This is about our humanity.”

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## Appendix – Truth Commissioners

Truth Commission on Poverty in Western New York

January 25, 2018

Rev. Mark E. Blue, President of the Buffalo Branch of the NAACP

Andrea Gonzalez, University at Buffalo Student in Architecture and Graphic Design

Richard Lipsitz, President of the Western New York Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO

Suzanne Flierl Krull, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Cuba Cultural Center

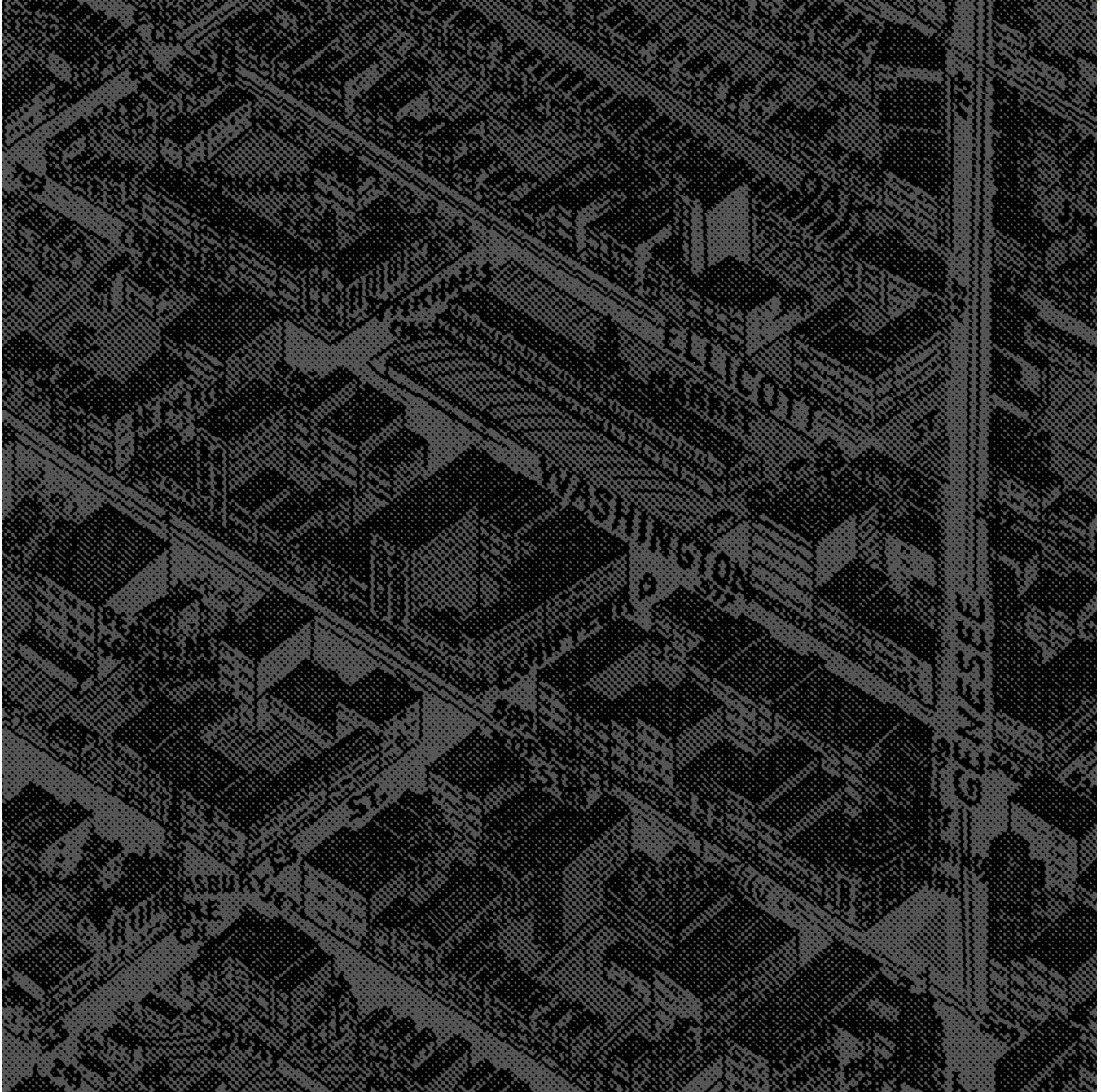
Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, Deputy Director of Partnership for the Public Good

Franchelle C.H. Parker, Executive Director of Open Buffalo

Afiya J. Rice, New York State School Counselor

Rev. Gerard Williams, Pastor of Unity Fellowship Church





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