

March 2015

Revisiting The War on Poverty: How Policy Can Better Shape The Income and Wages of Families With Children

Joy Moses

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.udc.edu/udclr>



Part of the [Family Law Commons](#), [Labor and Employment Law Commons](#), and the [Social Welfare Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Joy Moses, *Revisiting The War on Poverty: How Policy Can Better Shape The Income and Wages of Families With Children*, 18 U.D.C. L. Rev. 78 (2015).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.udc.edu/udclr/vol18/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ UDC Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of the District of Columbia Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ UDC Law.

**REVISITING THE WAR ON POVERTY:
HOW POLICY CAN BETTER SHAPE THE INCOME
AND WAGES OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN**

Joy Moses*

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson launched a “War on Poverty” while delivering his first State of the Union address on January 8, 1964. His language conveyed ambitious plans to recreate American society:

This budget, and this year’s legislative program, are designed to help each and every American citizen fulfill his basic hopes—his hopes for a fair chance to make good; his hopes for fair play from the law; his hopes for a full-time job on full-time pay; his hopes for a decent home for his family in a decent community; his hopes for a good school for his children with good teachers; and his hopes for security when faced with sickness or unemployment or old age.

Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity.¹

* Joy Moses is a writer and private consultant who focuses on poverty and racial justice policy. She formerly served as a senior policy analyst with the Poverty and Prosperity program at the Center for American Progress where she managed projects and developed policy reports and other forms of analysis. Joy’s other

Ultimately, Johnson's vision for a "Great Society" resulted in several pieces of significant legislation. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was the primary War on Poverty bill, but other pieces of Great Society legislation also worked to the benefit of low-income people in areas such as education, employment discrimination, and healthcare.²

By the time the War on Poverty reached its 10th anniversary, poverty rates had been cut in half, compared to where they were in the early 1960s (dropping from 22.2% to 11.1%).³ Despite such successes and the passage of 50 years, it is clear that the war has not been won and there is still some fighting left to do. And when it comes to America's children who will define the future of our nation, the stakes are overwhelmingly high.

Income and wages, and especially those of individuals raising children, must be at the forefront of next-generation strategies. This work is associated with significant challenges that include many of America's children living in near poverty; stagnating and declining wages and economic instability for adults in their prime childrearing years; and persistent race- and gender-based wage inequality. These challenges demand the types of bold solutions that were pursued in the 1960s by President Johnson, Congress, advocates, and a cadre of ordinary citizens who, amongst other activities, began to march for justice. Such solutions should include an expansive new income that, at a very minimum, reaches poor and near poor families. It should also include direct efforts to improve wages.

professional experiences include acting as a staff attorney with both the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. She currently serves on the board of the Washington Council of Lawyers, the District's pro bono and public interest bar association, and formerly served on the ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty. She received her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center and a B.A. from Stanford University.

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States, State of the Union Address (Jan. 8, 1964) (transcript available at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library).

² See JOHN A. ANDREW III, *LYNDON JOHNSON AND THE GREAT SOCIETY* (Ivan R. Dee, Inc. 1998).

³ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *HISTORICAL POVERTY TABLES—PEOPLE: TABLE 2. POVERTY STATUS OF PEOPLE BY FAMILY RELATIONSHIP, RACE, AND HISPANIC ORIGIN* (2014), <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2015) [hereinafter TABLE 2].

I. BACKGROUND

As President Johnson indicated in his War on Poverty speech, many Americans in the early 1960s were living on the outskirts of hope due to poverty. At the time, they totaled 36 million or 19% of the nation's people.⁴ The problem was affecting every segment of society—men and women, every racial grouping, every state, and every region.

Yet it was clear that the subject of poverty was highly intertwined with another major social issue—that of gender- and race-based societal inequality which left women and black Americans earning lower wages and having a higher likelihood of poverty due to their group identifications. Justice movements were in full swing and were a part of the era that produced the War on Poverty.

Less than six months before Johnson's congressional address, Martin Luther King, Jr. made his history-making "I Have a Dream" speech as a part of a march in which black leaders were demanding such items as job opportunities, an increased minimum wage, and employment discrimination protections.⁵ The need for action on their part was overwhelmingly clear. In the years leading up to the march, black poverty had been as high as 55% and, on average, black incomes were just 61% of white incomes.⁶

Women's advocates also had an agenda. Up until a year before the War on Poverty declaration, it had been a common practice to openly discriminate against female workers—for example, newspaper advertisements specifically asked for male candidates for positions that openly paid more than "women's work." President Kennedy decried the "arbitrary discrimination against women in the payment of wages" as he signed the Equal Pay Act of 1963, outlawing such practices.⁷ At the time, women's average earnings were about 60% of those of men

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Joy Moses & Zach Murray, *The March on Washington: Looking Back at 50 Years*, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS (Oct. 20, 2014, 8:09 P.M.), <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/civilliberties/news/2013/08/22/72698/the-march-on-washington-looking-back-on-50-years/>.

⁶ TABLE 2, *supra* note 3; U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES, TBL P-4 RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN OF PEOPLE (BOTH SEXES COMBINED) BY MEDIAN AND MEAN INCOME: 1947 TO 2013 (2014) <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/>.

⁷ John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, Remarks at the Signing of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (June 10, 1963).

and even Kennedy noted that Equal Pay Act was not going to be enough, stating that “much remains to be done to achieve full equality of economic opportunity.”⁸

Those at the intersection between these two groups—black women—bore the harshest consequences of inequality. In the years leading up to 1964, 71% of people in black single-mother families lived in poverty.⁹ Black women had an average income of only \$10,828 (adjusted for inflation as of 2013), which represented less than one-third of white men’s income and almost half that of black men’s income.¹⁰ The double whammy of race and gender inequality was leaving many of these women destitute.

II. PROGRESS IN THE WAR ON POVERTY

On August 20, 1964, President Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, the centerpiece of his War on Poverty.¹¹ Within adjacent months and years, he also secured passage of several other notable pieces of “Great Society” legislation that were relevant to low-income Americans, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act, and Medicare and Medicaid.

Over time, there were noticeable improvements in the poverty status quo. Overall poverty dropped—by the time of the 10th Anniversary of the War on Poverty, poverty rates were half of what they had been in the early 1960s (dropping from 22.2% to 11.1%).¹² Although there have been fluctuations over time, poverty rates have never again reached pre-War on Poverty levels.

⁸ *Id.* U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES, TBL. P-40 WOMEN’S EARNINGS AS A PERCENTAGE OF MEN’S EARNINGS BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN (2014), <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/>.

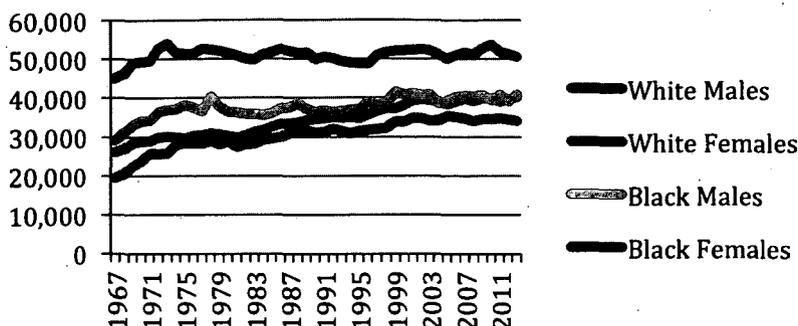
⁹ TABLE 2, *supra* note 3.

¹⁰ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES, TBL. P-3 RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN OF PEOPLE BY MEAN INCOME AND SEX: 1947 TO 2013 (2014), <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/>.

¹¹ Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508 (1964).

¹² TABLE 2, *supra* note 3.

Chart 1: Median Full-Time, Year-Round Wages (1967 - 2013)



Source: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES, TABLE P-38: FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS BY MEDIAN EARNINGS AND SEX (2014), <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/>.

Gender and racial groups with a history of being left out or left behind became far less likely to be at the absolute bottom of the economic ladder. For example, the black poverty rate dropped from a high of 55% in 1955 to reach its lowest point of 22.5% in 2000.¹³ Similarly, the rate for single-mother households (which reflect the status of female earners in the economy) dropped from a high of 50.3% in 1962 to reach its lowest point of 28.5% in 2000.¹⁴ Circumstances also improved for those at the intersection of the two groups—the poverty high for black single mother families, the family type with the highest poverty rates at the time, was 70.6% in 1959 but reached its lowest point of 37.4% in 2001.¹⁵

Undoubtedly, these shifts in the nation's poverty numbers were tied to modest improvements in wages.¹⁶ Wage gaps, framed here in terms of how much a group earns in comparison to each dollar made by white males, narrowed as earnings grew for groups that have been traditionally disadvantaged in the economy. The wage gap for white women has narrowed by \$0.22 since the mid-1960s, meaning that white women once earned \$0.58 for every dollar earned by a white

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *See supra* Chart I.

male—a number that had grown to \$0.80 for every dollar by 2013.¹⁷ And the wage gaps of black men and black women have narrowed over the 50-year period by \$0.16 and \$0.24, on average, for every dollar, respectively.¹⁸

III. STILL MORE WORK TO DO

Despite the progress that occurred immediately after the 1960s era of massive social change, it is clear that the nation still has more work to do on the issue of income and wages. Only then can it make a meaningful dent in the poverty problem.

A number of serious issues remain and are placing increasing pressures on all Americans while putting children, and therefore our nation's future, at risk.

A. *Far too Many Families with Children Still Live in Poverty*

Fifty years after the War on Poverty began, children are more likely than any other age group to live in poverty. Nearly one in five families with children have incomes that fell below the poverty line in 2013, representing 14.7 million children.¹⁹

Social inequality remains a serious problem. Black and Hispanic families are still far more likely to be poor than the rest of the population.²⁰ Continued challenges facing women are most evident when examining those families that solely rely on their income and earnings—being in a single-mother family is a far greater risk factor

¹⁷ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES: PEOPLE, TBL. P-38, FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS BY MEDIAN EARNINGS AND SEX (2014), <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/2013/p38AR.xls> [hereinafter TBL. P-38].

¹⁸ *Id.*

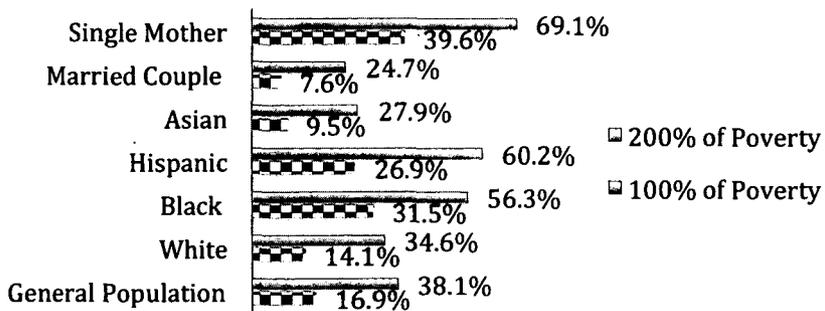
¹⁹ *Id.* U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, DETAILED POVERTY TABLES: PEOPLE, TBL. POV01, AGE AND SEX OF ALL PEOPLE, FAMILY MEMBERS AND UNRELATED INDIVIDUALS ITERATED BY INCOME-TO-POVERTY RATIO AND RACE (2014), http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032014/pov/pov01_000.htm; U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, DETAILED POVERTY TABLES: PEOPLE, TBL. POV04, FAMILIES BY AGE OF HOUSEHOLDER, NUMBER OF CHILDREN, AND FAMILY STRUCTURE (2014), http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032014/pov/pov04_100.htm.

²⁰ TBL. P-38, *supra* note 17. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, TABLE POV07: FAMILIES WITH RELATED CHILDREN UNDER 18 BY NUMBER OF WORKING FAMILY MEMBERS AND FAMILY STRUCTURE (2014), https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032013/pov/pov07_100.htm [hereinafter POV07]. *See infra* Chart II.

for poverty than any specific racial identity (including black or Hispanic).

There is also reason to worry about how white children are faring. By the 10th anniversary of the War on Poverty, white-child poverty was half of what it had been at the beginning of the 1960s.²¹ However, 15.6% of white children in families now live below the poverty line, a number that is approaching the group’s all-time high of 20.6% in 1959.²² Although black children also experienced some reversals, poverty rates were so high in the early 1960s that they have never again approached those levels. For white children, there is a risk that all the gains from the last 50 years could be lost—a potentially disappointing footnote on the War on Poverty, but more importantly, a sad failure to improve the lot of this particular subset of children.

Chart 2: Percent of Families Living in Poverty (2013)



Source: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, TABLE POV07: FAMILIES WITH RELATED CHILDREN UNDER 18 BY NUMBER OF WORKING FAMILY MEMBERS AND FAMILY STRUCTURE (2014), https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032013/pov/pov07_100.htm.

²¹ POV07, *supra* note 20.

²² U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, TABLE POV03: PEOPLE IN FAMILIES WITH RELATED CHILDREN UNDER 18 BY FAMILY STRUCTURE, AGE, AND SEX, ITERATED BY INCOME-TO-POVERTY RATIO AND RACE (2014), http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032014/pov/pov03_100.htm.

B. Data for “Families on the Brink” Suggest Greater Problems with Economic Insecurity than is Reflected by the Official Poverty Line

In recent years, there has been an ongoing national discussion about “families on the brink,” or those who have incomes just above the poverty line. These families experience a concerning degree of economic insecurity. By one popular definition (families/individuals falling between 100% and 200% of the poverty threshold), a family with a single mother and two children would be considered on the brink if its income was between \$18,769 and \$37,538; and for a two-parent family with two children that range would be between \$23,624 and \$47,248.²³ With such limited incomes, these families could be one personal crisis (for example, a job loss or work preventing family illness or disability) away from falling below the poverty line.

In 2013, an alarming number (38%) of American families with children were either poor or on the brink of poverty.²⁴ The impact of social inequality is great. Adding the ranks of the near poor to those of the poor reveals that a definite majority of families raising black and Hispanic children are experiencing distressing levels of economic insecurity. Women endeavoring to raise children on their own are the worst off—nearly 70% are poor or on the brink.²⁵

C. Wages and Incomes for Childrearing Aged Adults Have Been Stagnating or Declining

Over the last couple decades, wages and incomes of American workers have been stagnating or declining. For example, median incomes for 25–34 year olds are actually lower now (in real terms) than they were during much of the 1970s.²⁶ Making matters even worse, declining resources for childrearing are coinciding with increased costs. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the costs of raising a child have risen by 23% over the last

²³ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, TABLE POV35: POVERTY THRESHOLDS BY SIZE OF FAMILY AND NUMBER OF RELATED CHILDREN (2014), <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032014/pov/toc.htm> (last visited Feb. 13, 2015).

²⁴ POV07, *supra* note 20.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES: PEOPLE, TBL. P-10, AGE—PEOPLE (BOTH SEXES COMBINED—ALL RACES) BY MEDIAN AND MEAN INCOME: 1974 TO 2013 (2014), <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/2013/p10AR.xls>.

50 years with parents spending far more on housing, healthcare, childcare, and education than they once did.²⁷ Thus, young parents today are feeling an economic squeeze that was unknown to previous generations.

D. *Wage Gaps Have Narrowed But Nearly Enough*

Although women and people of color have made important gains, there continues to be a persistent wage gap between them and their white male counterparts.²⁸

Women's wages have become increasingly important to their children over the last 50 years. The number of children being raised in mother-only households grew from 8% to 24% between 1960 and 2014.²⁹ And many married couples with children (60%) are now relying on earnings from both spouses.³⁰ When women in these families bear the brunt of a wage gap, it impacts their children and helps to explain why so many single-mother households of all races continue to be the nation's most economically vulnerable type of family.

The wage gap for men of color should also be a cause of concern. The inability of men of color to provide for their children at the same level as white fathers is a contributor to the persistently elevated rates of poverty and near poverty amongst black and Hispanic children.

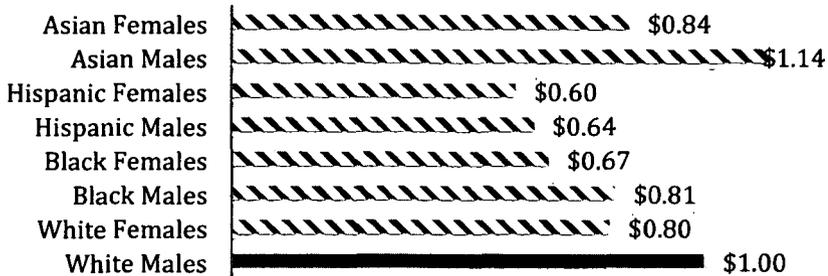
²⁷ MARK LINO, U.S. DEP'T AGRIC., EXPENDITURES ON CHILDREN BY FAMILIES, 2013 (Aug. 2014), http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/expenditures_on_children_by_families/crc2013.pdf.

²⁸ See *infra* Chart III.

²⁹ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OLD: 1960 TO 2013, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/children.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2015).

³⁰ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, TABLE FG1: MARRIED COUPLE FAMILY GROUPS, BY LABOR FORCE STATUS OF BOTH SPOUSES, AND RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN OF THE REFERENCE PERSON (2014), <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2014FG.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2015).

Chart 3: Earnings Compared to Every \$1 Made By A White Male (2013)*



*Based on median earnings of full-time, year-round workers. This chart does not account for other factors such as immigrant status or country of origin, masking racial subgroup differences—some subgroups fare far better or worse than general racial/ethnic categories would suggest.

Source: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HISTORICAL INCOME TABLES, TABLE P-38: FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS BY MEDIAN EARNINGS AND SEX (2014), <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/> (last visited Feb. 13, 2015).

E. *Instability is Common for Those at the Bottom of the Economic Ladder*

Many Americans who experience poverty only do so for a short period of time. Roughly 50% who fall below the line rise above it a year later.³¹ Families struggle with temporary or not-so-temporary setbacks, a significant one being the loss of a job—but other factors may come into play, such as a wage earner contracting an illness or becoming disabled. Weathering these storms can be difficult if limited wages and the demands of childrearing prevent parents from saving for a rainy day.

Unfortunately, these types of setbacks often occur within a family more than once. Approximately 50% of those who escape poverty

³¹ SIGNE M. MCKERNAN ET AL., URBAN INST., *TRANSITIONING IN AND OUT OF POVERTY* (2009), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411956_transitioningpoverty.pdf.

become poor again within five years.³² Cycling in and out of poverty creates some level of instability for those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

IV. CREATING A NEW INCOME SUPPLEMENT FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Fulfilling the promise of the War on Poverty and fully addressing the challenges outlined above would require a comprehensive advocacy campaign aimed at improving the wages and income of poor and near-poor families with children. The campaign would likely need to address such needs as reducing unnecessary occupational segregation, increasing the perceived value and investments in fields with significant representations of women and/or people of color, deconstructing New Jim Crow policies (mass incarceration and the barriers that those with criminal records face in getting good jobs),³³ immigration reforms that eliminate the economic exploitation of undocumented workers, protecting the enforceability of non-discrimination laws, and improving educational opportunities for low-income students.

Despite the import of such battles, there is a need for something else—an income supplement or child benefit for economically insecure families with children. An income supplement would serve “in the meantime” purposes, providing some immediate help for families while the country makes progress on the big challenges of stagnating and declining wages and closing the gender- and race-based wage gaps. A child benefit would also act as a safety net, aiding in large-scale economic downturns as well as temporary personal setbacks.

The notion of an income supplement, or any new government spending, is sure to be a challenging one fraught with many hurdles, especially during the nation’s current era of frequent federal budget battles, budget cutting efforts in Congress, and resistance to entitlements in some sectors. However, the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty and other Great Society programs serve as a reminder of what can be accomplished through bold thoughts and efforts—the creation of entirely new government services and the radical transformation of our society.

³² *Id.*

³³ MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS* (New Press 2010).

Thus, policymakers should think boldly, and create a strongly needed income supplement program that would reduce child poverty and include the following components:

1. Ability to Reach All Economically Insecure Families.

Income supplements can take multiple forms. There are certain advantages to having a universal benefit that reaches families with children at all income levels—this benefit type recognizes that costs of raising a child are significant for all income levels, it removes the stigma that is sometimes associated with participating in a low-income program (families would not be getting a handout but a sum of money that everyone needs to help raise their children), and it simplifies application procedures by not requiring diligent checks into a family's income.

However, efforts to limit costs may lead to an income cap (for example, excluding families at 200% of poverty or above) that would ideally ensure the participation of parents who struggle the most with the costs of childrearing.

The ability to reach all families, or all economically insecure families, would be a value-add to current policies. Current major government efforts each reach a specific target population—for example, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) reaches workers with modest earnings, Social Security Insurance (SSI) is for people with disabilities, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families reaches mostly single-mother families that are experiencing the greatest hardships.

A general child benefit would capture any families that fall between existing holes in the current safety net. Simple eligibility criteria (for example, just having a child or just having a child and falling below a set income limit) and processes for applying will minimize any confusion by potential participants about whether the participants qualify for the benefit.

2. Act as Stable Source of Income.

As noted above, many Americans move in and out of poverty, being affected by temporary setbacks. During these transitions, they may be periodically qualifying and disqualifying for the benefits attached to the current safety net. For example, during really bad times, a family may be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program (also known as food stamps) but realize no (or a smaller than typical) value from the EITC—and the very next year they could be doing much better financially, benefiting from the EITC but not food stamps. Thus, families may not only experience instability in their income, but may also experience instability in the benefits programs and tax breaks that they are able to participate in.

A new child benefit should be the one source of income that families can continuously count on receiving whether they have recently lost a job or are working, ill or healthy, disabled or not disabled, married or recently separated, or experiencing some other set of changing life circumstances. This would ensure some minimal amount of security for families, a guaranteed income source for a survival priority (e.g., food for their children, at least a portion of the rent, the car payment that provides transportation for a job search) when times are tough.

3. Be Federally Administered Via a Simplified Process.

Many federal government programs are administered through states and localities that may each be creating their own rules governing the delivery of services. One federal program could look very different from one state to the next—for example there may be somewhat varying eligibility criteria, benefit levels, or means of applying for services.

With the goal of creating a stable source of income that has a clear and understandable value assigned to it, as well as simplified processes, it makes sense to have one set of rules that are developed at the federal level of government and that are applied in the same manner for every family across the country. One set of clear simple rules that treat everyone the same further act as a safeguard against any potential inequitable distribution of resources based on race, family structure, faith traditions, political leanings, or any other factors.

4. Be Delivered on a Monthly Basis.

The child benefit should be distributed on a monthly basis, easing the ability of families to apply the funds to such monthly expenses as rent or utilities. This fulfills a void associated with EITC which better serves another need—once a year payments that can be strategically used by families (and especially those families whose paycheck to

paycheck existence doesn't allow for savings) for rare big ticket items like school tuition or a down payment on car to get to and from work.

5. A Benefit Amount that Adjusts as Childrearing Costs Adjust.

Since the real costs of childrearing have been on the incline over the last couple of decades, a new child benefit should account for cost fluctuations. The USDA releases an annual report that documents how much families actually spend on childrearing with its numbers already being used to calculate appropriate child support obligations. This data could also be used to annually adjust the amount of the new child benefit.

Depending on the availability of resources, the child benefit amount could be one-eighth or one-quarter of the low-end expenditures of the mid-range income group identified by the USDA report.³⁴ In 2013, these households had earnings between \$61,530 and \$106,540 and spent an average of \$12,800 to \$14,970 per year on childrearing.³⁵ The benefits and costs of this approach breakdown as follows:

	Child Benefit Amount Per Year	Child Benefit Amount Per Month	Overall Price Tag (Covering All Families Below 200% of Poverty in 2012)
1/8 of Mid-Range Income Group Spending	\$1,600	\$133.33	\$23.4 billion
1/4 of Mid-Range Income Group Spending	\$3,200	\$266.67	\$46.7 billion

These payments would help bridge the gap between the childrearing expenditures of the lowest income group and the mid-range income group. Any future adjustments would reflect changes in the costs of childrearing over time as well as changes in income inequality. The \$12,800 base amount reflects the average spending on one young child in a married-couple family—but the above estimates

³⁴ LINO, *supra* note 27.

³⁵ *Id.*

reflect a scenario in which every family receives the same child benefit amount no matter the number of children in their family or their ages.

Actual spending would be even less than suggested since it would be unlikely that all eligible families would take advantage of such a benefit.

6. Phase Out Process.

Finally, it would be advisable to add a phase out process for the program so that families don't fall off a benefits cliff once they accumulate even \$1 over any income limit for the child benefit. Abruptly losing 100% of the benefit may be a difficult adjustment for many families—a phase out process would slowly decrease the value of the benefit as a family approaches the upper income limit for the program. A phase out at the upper end of the income spectrum would also decrease bottom line program costs.

CONCLUSION

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty—and various other efforts associated with the Great Society—is an excellent time to reflect on how far we have come as a nation as well as how far left we have to go in conquering the problem of child poverty, and poverty more generally. Wages and income are clearly important to future anti-poverty efforts. Progress is necessary in reducing gender- and race-based wage gaps, challenges that the nation was grappling with 50 years ago, but there is also a need to address new challenges such as stagnating and declining wages.

As society grapples with making these improvements, we should expand the social safety to account for current failures. The expansion should come in the form of a new child benefit for the growing number of families experiencing economic insecurity (poverty or near poverty) and double whammy of stagnating wages and growing childrearing costs. The child benefit should be an easily accessible and a stable source of income as families face various types of setbacks and challenges. Such a program would work toward ensuring that the nation's children have what they need to grow, thrive, and protect America's future.