



NEWS RELEASE

9/15/16

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Forrister: Census data show need to expand Medicaid, raise wages in Alabama

Alabama also should invest in housing and public transit to reduce poverty, create jobs, Forrister says

More than one in five Alabama families with children lived in poverty in 2015, U.S. Census data released Thursday show. Those numbers underscore the need for Alabama to do more to help families get ahead, Arise Citizens' Policy Project executive director Kimble Forrister said Thursday.

“Alabama’s high poverty rate shows we still have a lot of work to do to ensure everyone has an opportunity to get ahead in life,” Forrister said. “By raising the minimum wage, expanding Medicaid for working adults and investing in better housing and public transportation options, Alabama can keep workers healthier and more productive, and ensure that their hard work pays off.”

Alabama’s family poverty rate of nearly 14 percent remains higher than it was in 2007 and still exceeds the national average by 3 percentage points. Overall, 18.5 percent of Alabamians lived below the poverty line (about \$24,000 for a family of four) in 2015.

The state’s overall poverty rate is down since 2014, but Alabama’s child poverty rate of 26.6 percent remains one of the highest in the nation and is still higher than it was in 2007, before the Great Recession. Alabama’s child poverty rate also varies widely by region, from a low of 13 percent in the 6th Congressional District to a shocking high of 42 percent in the 7th Congressional District, which includes much of Birmingham and many rural Black Belt counties.

More than 250 Arise members met in Montgomery last week to consider ways to reduce Alabama’s persistently high poverty rate. Forrister’s policy recommendations touch on several of the issues that Arise members identified as 2017 priorities. ([Read the full list of Arise’s 2017 issue priorities here.](#))

“Closing the Medicaid coverage gap and investing in public transportation and affordable housing would create thousands of jobs across Alabama and make our state a better place to live and work,” Forrister said. “By combining those steps with the creation of a higher state minimum wage, we can build a thriving economy and make high poverty rates a thing of the past in Alabama.”

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[Arise Citizens' Policy Project](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of congregations, organizations and individuals promoting public policies to improve the lives of low-income Alabamians.