



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 9, 2014

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Joint Center Congratulates Promise Zones Grantees

(WASHINGTON) – Earlier today, President Obama announced that the first five Promise Zones community grants have been awarded, namely to San Antonio, Texas; Philadelphia; Los Angeles; Southeastern Kentucky; and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies congratulates these communities, and shares their optimism that smart, geographically targeted policies can help struggling regions to recover from the lingering effects of the economic downturn.

Research suggests that place-based strategies such as the Promise Zones initiative will revitalize high-poverty communities by attracting private investment, expanding affordable housing, improving educational opportunities, providing tax incentives for hiring workers, and helping to drive down violent criminal activity.

The Promise Zones initiative builds upon the success of existing federal programs such as Choice Neighborhoods, a redevelopment program that provides local leaders with proven tools to revitalize distressed public housing and concentrated poverty into vibrant, opportunity-rich neighborhoods; Promise Neighborhoods, which builds a pipeline from the earliest ages of educational support services around a strong school environment, focused on the goal of high school graduation and college-going for every student; and the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program, which targets neighborhoods with persistent violent crime, focusing on hot spots of criminal activity, by employing cross-sector strategies that show evidence of impact in reducing violence.

“Promise Zones are among the most promising anti-poverty strategies in over a generation,” said Brian Smedley, Ph.D., Interim President and CEO of the Joint Center. “This is an effort to tackle some of the most persistent structural barriers to opportunity experienced by people living in communities that have suffered from economic neglect and political marginalization.”

“We know from our own experience with initiatives such as PLACE MATTERS, which the Joint Center has managed since 2007, that place-based strategies can tackle the challenges brought about by high levels of segregation and poverty concentration,” said Autumn Saxton-Ross, Ph.D., Program Director for PLACE MATTERS at the Joint Center. “We look forward to working with Promise Zones communities to advance successful practices around the country.”

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