



# Eradicating Poverty: Economic Security

In the Deep South, racism and poverty are entrenched in laws and policies that perpetuate the economic exploitation of Black and Brown communities. The SPLC's focus states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi have some of the highest rates of poverty, childhood hunger and illiteracy; the highest need for affordable housing and tenant rights protections; and the worst health outcomes in the nation. For example, Mississippi has the nation's highest poverty rate (19%), 26% of Mississippi children live in poverty, and 19% have difficulty meeting basic food needs. In many areas, the experience of poverty is not situational but persistent and concentrated, which limits opportunities for Black and Brown communities to access affordable housing, quality public schools and good jobs.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) works to build power, wealth and resources in the Deep South, especially for Black and Brown communities. We advocate for the human right to affordable housing, quality public schools and good jobs that provide Black and Brown communities with the opportunity to go beyond basic human needs — and thrive.

## Key Priorities in the Fight to Eradicate Poverty

### Safeguard and Strengthen the Social Safety Net

States in the Deep South rely heavily on federal dollars to pay for basic needs programs, with federal dollars accounting for around 40% of their budgets. Cuts in the recently enacted “One Big Ugly Bill” to health care, housing, education and other basic needs programs will have an outsized impact on the Deep South. In these states, approximately 3.6 million people will lose health care, and over half a million will lose some food assistance as a direct result of this law.

We work to protect funding and secure the appropriations needed to expand access to health care, food and nutrition, housing, disaster relief, farm aid, child care, TANF and other federal anti-poverty programs. We demand more transparency and accountability for federal funding allocations and distributions in order to reduce discriminatory barriers such as the expansion of work reporting requirements and block granting as well as the discriminatory funding scheme in our states.

### Advance Safe, Affordable Housing as a Human Right

More than half the people in this country spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Nearly one-third of adults in the Deep South are not current on their rent or mortgage and are therefore at elevated risk of eviction or foreclosure. Instead of investing in long-term solutions, local and state governments across the country — especially in the Deep South — are using the criminal legal system to punish people experiencing homelessness with fines, fees and imprisonment for conduct that is necessary for survival: sleeping, camping, sitting, lying down, storing personal property, asking for help, or otherwise being physically present in public spaces.

Guided by the international human rights framework, which recognizes housing and an adequate standard of living as human rights, the SPLC recommends increasing federal tenant rights protections and investment in affordable, high-quality, safe and healthy housing. We challenge attempts to punish those experiencing homelessness for conduct necessary for survival. Instead, we champion housing, not handcuffs, to end homelessness.

### **Prevent systemic land loss and wealth extraction in historic Black communities**

After the Civil War, Black people who were formerly enslaved made tremendous strides toward acquiring land; by 1910, Black farmers owned around 14% of all U.S. farmland. But over the last century, 12 million acres of Black-owned land has been taken through government takings and heirs property title loss, oftentimes as a direct result of racially discriminatory laws, policies and economic conditions. Systemic land loss and wealth extraction from communities of color — especially Black communities in the Deep South — is one of the leading racial justice issues contributing to the widening racial wealth gap and economic inequality.

We work to protect historic communities from development and eminent domain threats so that land can be used to benefit and enrich the members of the long-present community. We challenge efforts which unduly extract wealth and prevent wealth generation for communities of color. We champion solutions such as increased federal funding for legal and technical assistance, enshrining preservation and civil rights protections, and improving agency actions which prevent, repair and redress harms.

### **Recommendations for Congress**

- Fully fund basic needs programs in the appropriations process and reject additional cuts and rescissions.
- Increase investments in affordable, high-quality, safe and healthy housing and reject efforts to criminalize and institutionalize people experiencing homelessness.
- Increase federal support and improve historic preservation and protections against systemic land loss.

### **Deep South State Priorities in the Fight to Eradicate Poverty**

#### **Alabama**

**Affordable, Quality Housing for All:** Over the past four years, Alabama has had record budget surpluses. It could have invested these funds in creating more accessible housing or mental health and substance abuse treatment; instead, the Legislature voted to criminalize unhoused people seeking assistance from their local communities along public roadways and spend over \$1 billion in ARPA funding on new prison construction. Approaches that provide dignity and stability to hardworking families through affordable and safe housing have proven to work across the country; these investments enable individuals to regain financial footings and reintegrate into their communities.

**Recommendation:** The Alabama Legislature should reinforce the dignity of its citizens and create a recurring funding source for the Alabama Housing Trust Fund (established in 2012) to ensure quality, affordable housing for Alabamians — regardless of their economic, physical or mental health status.

#### **Florida**

**Food Security for Children:** Florida is one of only 15 states that declined to participate in the federal government's Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (Summer EBT) program. This decision means that thousands of Florida children suffered the summer months without regular access to safe, nutritious food. The SPLC continues to encourage the state of Florida to apply for this funding for summer 2026. During the 2026 budget cycle, we will advocate for dedicated funding for 2027. It is an injustice to Florida's families that their state has failed to obtain this crucial, readily available federal funding.

**Recommendation:** The Florida Department of Children and Families should initiate the application process for the 2026 Summer EBT program as well as for legislators to make this funding permanent during the 2026 budget cycle.

#### **Georgia**

**Funding Georgia's Safety Net:** Georgia faces one of the highest poverty rates in the nation, compounded by state underinvestment in housing, health care and income supports. Federal budget cuts to core programs like SNAP, TANF, housing assistance and Medicaid expansion threaten to deepen these disparities. Because Georgia already ranks near the bottom in per-capita safety net spending, communities, especially Black, immigrant, LGBTQ+, and disabled Georgians are disproportionately left without protections. Without new state-level commitments, federal retrenchment will accelerate housing insecurity, food instability and economic precarity. These conditions push families into crisis, burden local governments and nonprofits, and entrench cycles of

incarceration and poverty. The SPLC in Georgia will work to mitigate these harms by advancing proactive, equity-driven policies that replace punishment with stability and opportunity informed by the needs and priorities of the communities in the Black Belt.

**Recommendation:** Georgia state and local officials should shield Georgians from the devastating effects of federal disinvestment. By centering community priorities, we will secure housing, food and income supports even in the face of federal cuts, end the criminalization of poverty, and defend the right of local governments to enact living wage laws, housing trust funds, and other solutions their residents demand. These strategies are not only practical safeguards — they are essential to building a stronger safety net, resisting austerity, and driving a poverty-eradication agenda grounded in dignity, equity and justice.

## Mississippi

**Fortifying Economic Safeguards:** Mississippi's approach to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program differs significantly from federal guidelines, particularly in its treatment of qualifying work. For instance, school should be counted and considered allowable work, as it is under the federal standard. If the federal standard were followed, many Mississippians who could be eligible for TANF because they are attending college would have access to this important economic safeguard. The SPLC is proud to have successfully supported an increase in direct cash assistance in recent legislative sessions and plans to move toward an additional increase in the 2026 legislative session.

**Recommendation:** The Mississippi Legislature should increase the base amount of TANF assistance and ensure safeguards like direct cash assistance can provide economic benefit to the beneficiary and their community. The Mississippi Legislature should also remove the barriers to increase the pool of those who qualify.

## Louisiana

**Protecting safety net:** Louisiana has one of the highest poverty rates in the country, with nearly 1 in 5 residents living below the federal poverty line. Families face chronic barriers to stability, including low wages, high housing costs, limited access to affordable child care, and frequent disruptions to health care coverage. Federal disinvestments and harmful state policies have only made matters worse. Cuts to SNAP benefits, barriers to FITAP eligibility, and inadequate housing support all deepen the economic hardship. Black, immigrant and rural communities are disproportionately affected, facing the greatest risk of eviction, food insecurity and loss of income. Rather than strengthening the safety net, Louisiana has too often pursued short-term austerity measures that leave families vulnerable.

**Recommendation:** The Louisiana Legislature should expand and protect Louisiana's social safety net. This includes defending SNAP and Medicaid access from harmful cuts, raising the FITAP benefit level to reflect real household needs, and investing in affordable housing and child care support.



For more information on the SPLC's work, contact Theresa Lau at [theresa.lau@splcenter.org](mailto:theresa.lau@splcenter.org).

For more information on the SPLC's work, visit our website at [splcenter.org/policy-advocacy](https://splcenter.org/policy-advocacy) or scan here.

