

DECEMBER 2020

*DIVISION
OF HEALTH
PROMOTION*

**JACKSON
COUNTY**
HEALTH
DEPARTMENT



REPORT

SUBURBAN POVERTY

in Eastern Jackson County (EJC)



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AFFECTED

ECONOMIC STABILITY



EDUCATION



HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE



NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT



Preface

The majority of this report was written in late 2019 and early 2020. In March of 2020 the Health Department shifted all duties and priorities to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. As a small public health agency, the limited staff capacity we had was needed to respond to the emerging needs of the community. As COVID-19 has caused drastic changes to our country, including a rise in unemployment and a resulting increase in the need for the safety net, it will be a few months, if not a full year, before we are able to know the immediate extent of these changes in our jurisdiction with specific, local data. The ramifications will likely have years of impact on our community, and will exacerbate existing racial inequalities. In light of this, we've decided to release this report as a starting point, as these issues were a problem prior to the massive economic upheavals the U.S. has experienced in 2020. We plan to follow this report with a second report which will examine the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our community, and the local safety net in particular.

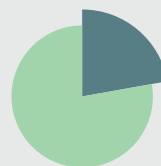
The Rise of Suburban Poverty

In metropolitan areas across the United States, suburbs are seeing rising poverty rates as well as an increase in concentrated poverty. After decades of growth in the U.S., more people live in suburbs today than in cities. Suburban residents are also the fastest growing poor population in the country. From 1990 to 2014, the number of suburban poor doubled in the 100 largest U.S. metropolitan areas. The average rate of poverty in suburban census tracts also increased from 8.3% to 12.2% suggesting that poverty is becoming more common in suburban areas (Allard, 2017).

10.9%
the overall proportion of EJC residents living in poverty in 2017



22.2%
the poverty rate of the portion of Kansas City that is in Jackson County



Reconsidering Poverty and the Suburbs

Poverty is often associated with urban neighborhoods - particularly the urban core - and with people of color, yet trends indicate that poverty is growing in the suburbs. In addition, poverty is increasing across race and ethnic groups - including Black, Hispanic, and white populations.

The demographics of suburbs are also changing. People of color and immigrants are moving out of inner cities and into suburban areas in search of affordable housing and other opportunities. Poverty, where it occurs, as well as stereotypical beliefs about suburban residents, must be reconsidered. The perception that suburbs are comprised of mostly well-off, white families is problematic because it keeps decision makers and those who uphold the safety net from recognizing the suburban families who are in need (Murphy & Allard, 2015).

Poverty in Eastern Jackson County

Jackson County, located in Northwestern Missouri, consists of Kansas City, MO on its western edge as well as a number of smaller municipalities lo-

TABLE 1

Poverty rates for Eastern Jackson census tracts in 2017

Indicator	Raw Pop in Poverty	Poverty Rate (%)	p-value
AGE			<0.001
<18	15,853	16.50	
>= 18	25,160	9.00	
SEX			<0.001
Female	23,470	12.06	
Male	17,543	9.69	
RACE - WHITE/BLACK			<0.001
Black alone	7,973	19.93	
White alone	27,374	8.99	
RACE - WHITE/NON-WHITE			<0.001
Non-White	13,639	19.16	
White alone	27,374	8.99	
ETHNICITY			<0.001
Hispanic/Latino	5,487	21.83	
Non-Hispanic/Latino	25,038	8.59	
MARITAL STATUS			<0.001
Single female parent household	4,143	24.65	
Married-parent household	2,280	3.39	
HOME OWNERSHIP (OF FAMILIES)			<0.001
Renter	5,891	23.71	
Homeowner	1,966	2.68	
EMPLOYMENT			<0.001
Part-time worker	8,524	12.84	
Full-time worker	2,706	1.81	
EDUCATION (AGED 25 AND OLDER)			<0.001
High school or less	12,609	13.24	
Some college or more	8,326	5.33	

NOTE: Data derived from American Community Survey 2017 5-year estimates.

b Each p-value represents a hypothesis test of difference in population proportions with a 95% confidence level.

cated to the east and southeast of Kansas City proper.

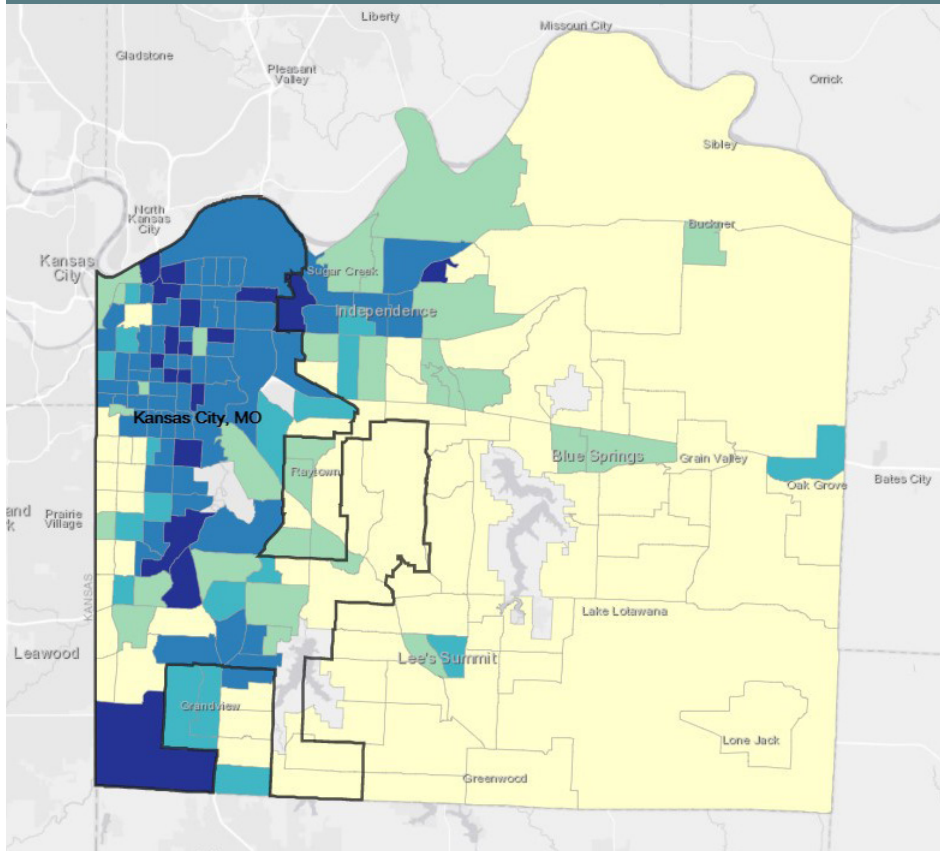
The Jackson County Health Department's jurisdiction includes all municipalities in Jackson County outside of Kansas City, commonly referred to as Eastern Jackson County (EJC). EJC is a large geographic area that contains 17 suburban communities and unincorporated Jackson County, totaling over 381,000 people. While the focus of this report is on poverty in suburban EJC, poverty in urban areas remains an issue.

The overall proportion of EJC residents living in poverty in 2017 was 10.9%. This is slightly higher today than in 2010 (9.6%). Table 1 breaks down the poverty rate among different demographic groups in EJC.

It is important to note that the rates of poverty in urban areas have either remained the same or have become worse (Allard, 2017). For the portion of Kansas City that is in Jackson County, the poverty rate is 22.2%; more than double the poverty rate in EJC. Still, there has been a steady shift in which the metro's eastern suburbs have seen a rise in poverty rates, as well as increased areas of concentrated poverty, defined as census tracts with poverty rates greater than 20%.

The following maps show poverty rates for census tracts in all of Jackson County in both 2010 and 2017. The differences between these two maps demonstrates how poverty has continued to remain high in Kansas City and spread east.

2010 POVERTY RATE FOR JACKSON COUNTY CENSUS TRACTS



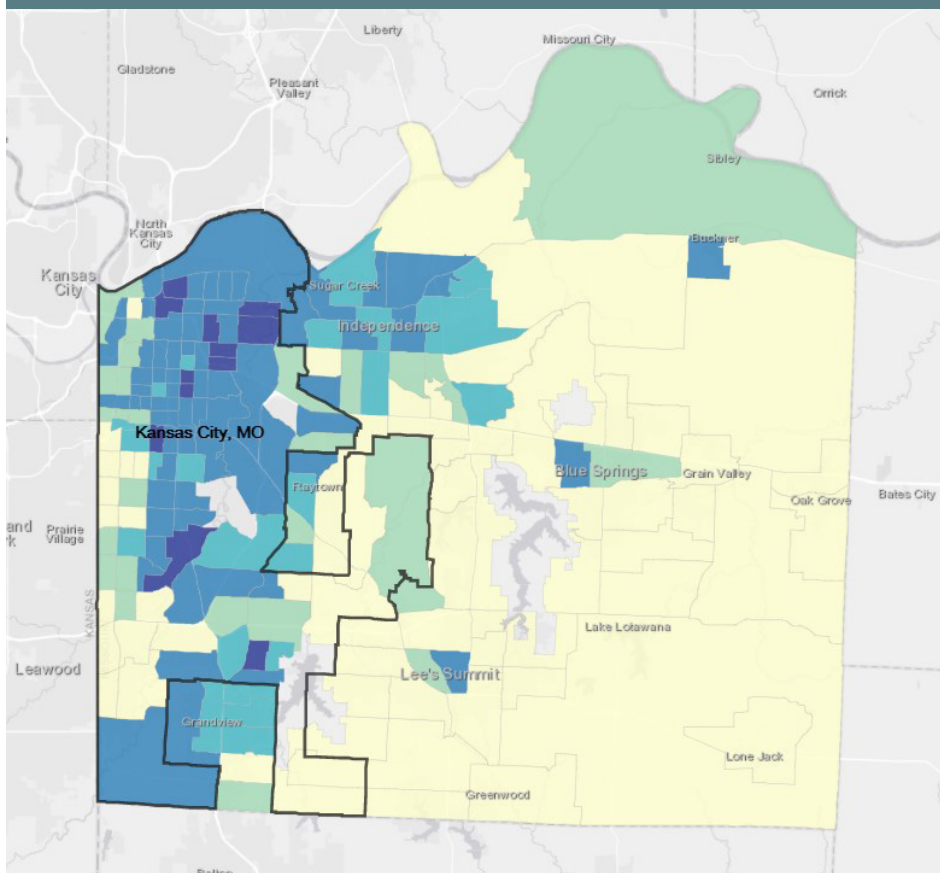
Legend

2010 Poverty Rate for Jackson County Census Tracts

Percent in Poverty



2017 POVERTY RATE FOR JACKSON COUNTY CENSUS TRACTS



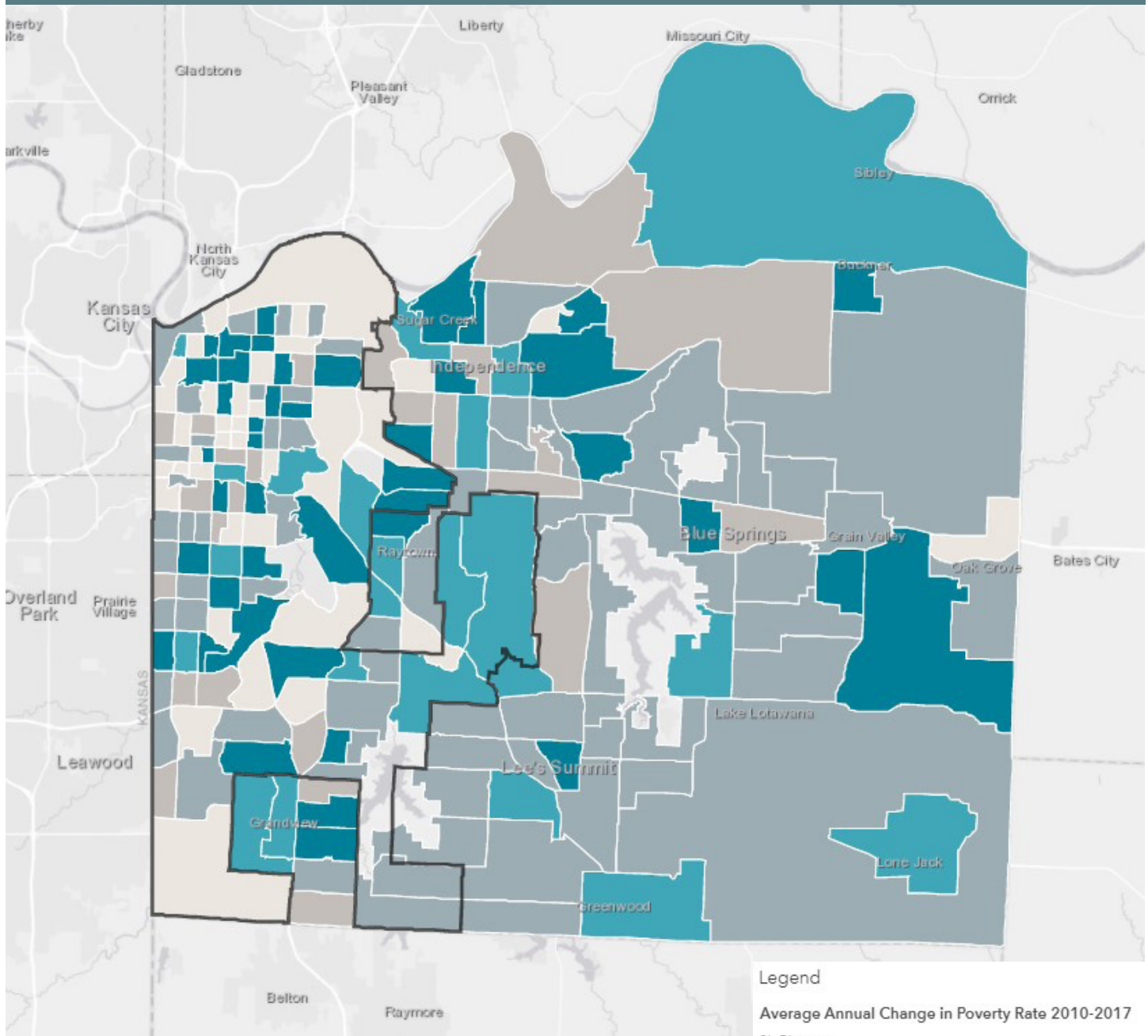
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2017 Poverty Rate for Jackson County Census Tracts

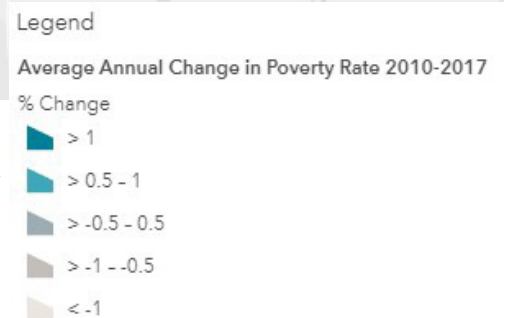
Percent in Poverty



AVERAGE ANNUAL CHANGE IN POVERTY RATE 2010-2017



There are a number of census tracts in Kansas City, MO, that have remained stable or even improved over the years studied, while at the same time, almost every census tract in EJC remained the same or saw increases in poverty.



The above map shows the average percent change in poverty rate for each census tract over the eight years studied. Census tracts in darker blue had a bigger increase in the poverty rate from 2010 to 2017, compared to the rest of the county.



Urban versus. Suburban Poor Populations in Jackson County

There are similarities as well as differences between Kansas City and EJC’s poor populations.

The socioeconomic characteristics making someone more or less likely to live in poverty including employment, education, and homeowner status are similar for both Kansas City and EJC.

One difference between poor populations is the number of nonwhite versus white people living in poverty. In Kansas City, the proportion of nonwhite people to white people is 51% to 49%. Nonwhite people make up a higher proportion of those living in poverty in Kansas City at 68.8%.

In EJC, the proportion of white people to non-white people is 81% to 19% with white people making up a higher proportion of the poor population at 66.7%.

However, for both Kansas City and EJC, racial and ethnic minorities have a disproportionately higher rate of poverty.

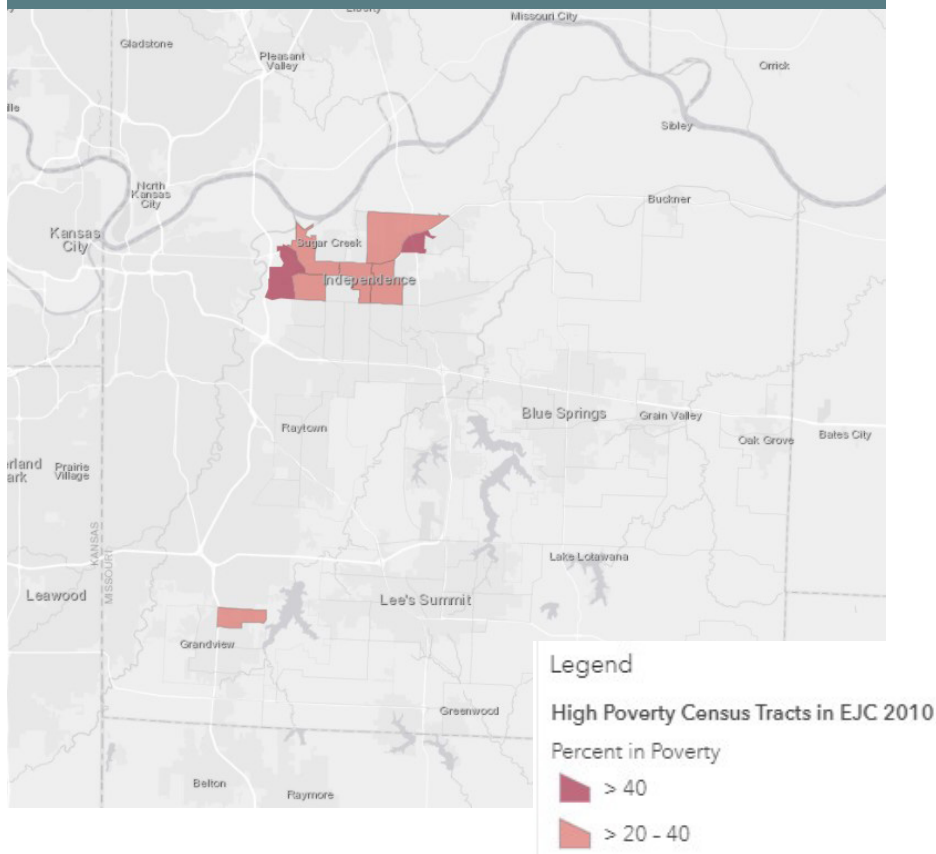


TABLE 2

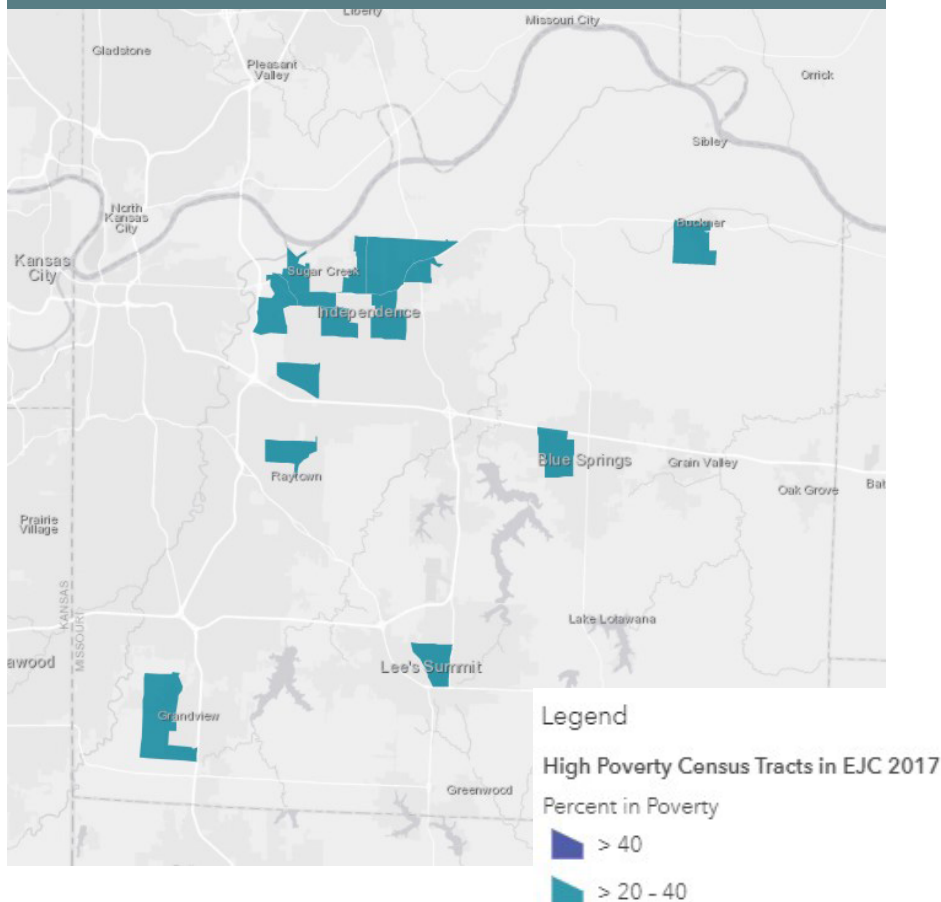
Comparison of Kansas City and EJC poverty rates among key demographic indicators

Indicator	Kansas City Poverty Rate (%)	EJC Poverty Rate (%)
AGE		
<18	34.35	16.50
>= 18	18.80	9.00
SEX		
Female	23.69	12.06
Male	20.61	9.69
RACE - WHITE/BLACK		
Black alone	28.77	19.93
White alone	14.23	8.99
RACE - WHITE/NON-WHITE		
Non-White	29.74	19.16
White alone	14.23	8.99
ETHNICITY		
Hispanic/Latino	30.33	21.83
Non-Hispanic/Latino	13.27	8.59
MARITAL STATUS		
Single female parent household	34.45	24.65
Married-parent household	6.02	3.39
HOME OWNERSHIP (OF FAMILIES)		
Renter	31.86	23.71
Homeowner	7.26	2.68
EMPLOYMENT		
Part-time worker	27.73	12.84
Full-time worker	4.62	1.81
EDUCATION (AGED 25 AND OLDER)		
High school or less	27.22	13.24
Some college or more	10.64	5.33

HIGH POVERTY CENSUS TRACTS IN EJC 2010



HIGH POVERTY CENSUS TRACTS IN EJC 2017



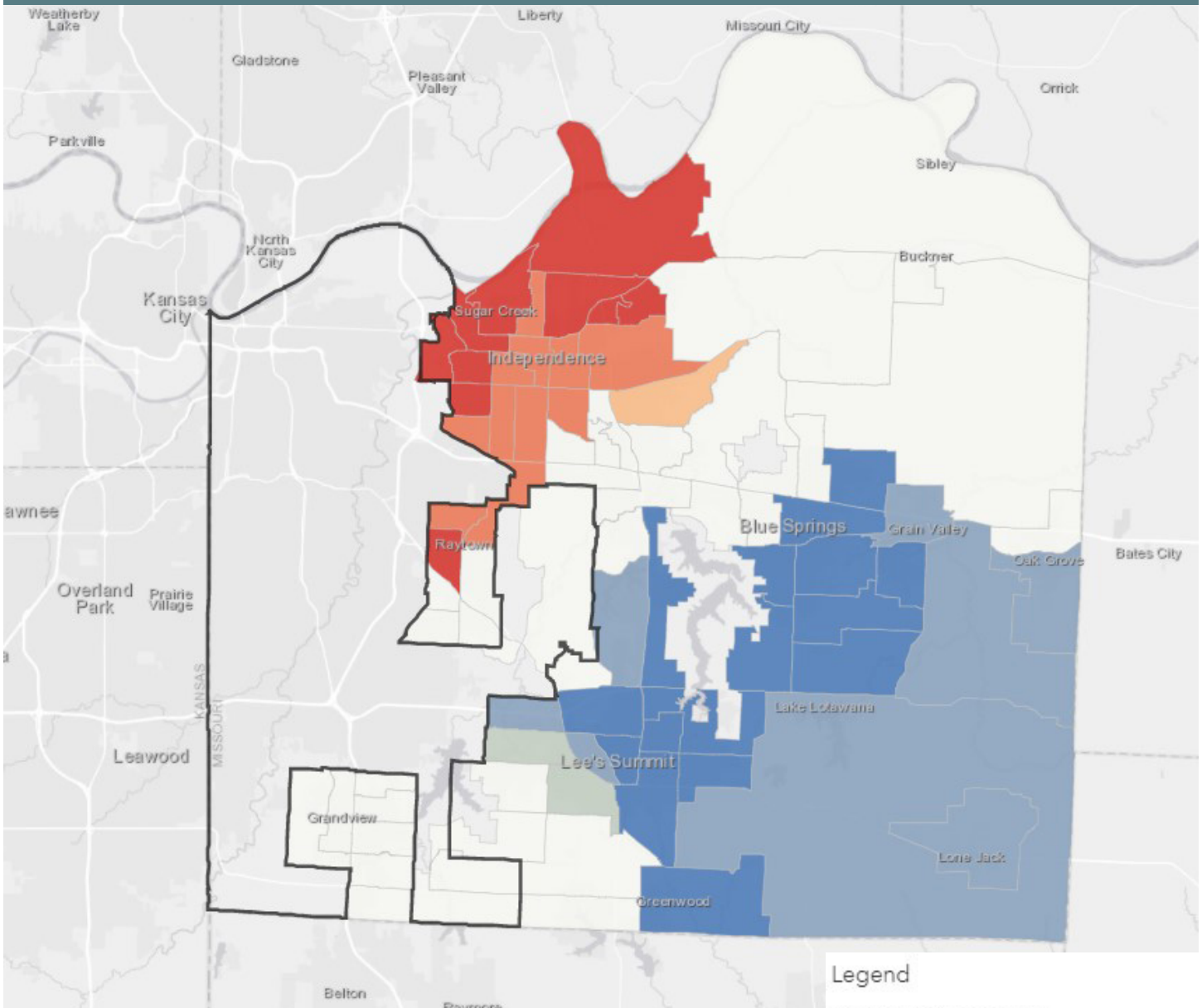
Concentrated Poverty in EJC

To analyze areas of higher poverty more deeply in EJC, census tracts where poverty rates are greater than 20%, and geographic “clustering” of poverty in EJC were examined. The number of high-poverty census tracts in EJC has grown since 2010, when eight census tracts had a poverty rate higher than 20%. These were mostly concentrated in Independence. As of 2017, EJC holds 13 high-poverty census tracts. These 13 are spread throughout a number of EJC municipalities including Buckner, Blue Springs, Grandview, Independence, Lee’s Summit, and Raytown.

The number of high-poverty census tracts in EJC has grown since 2010.



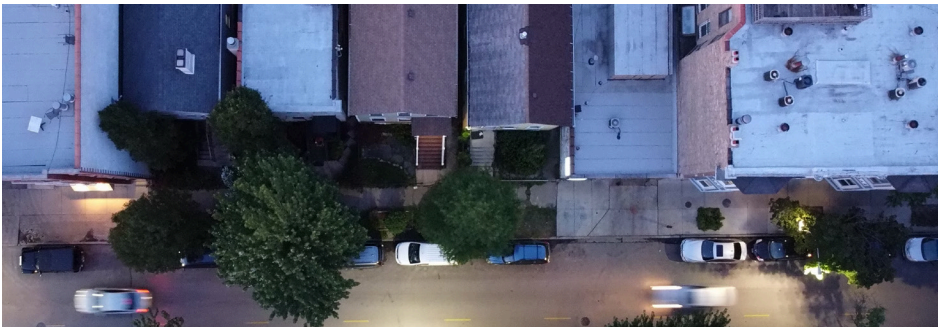
HIGH POVERTY HOT SPOTS



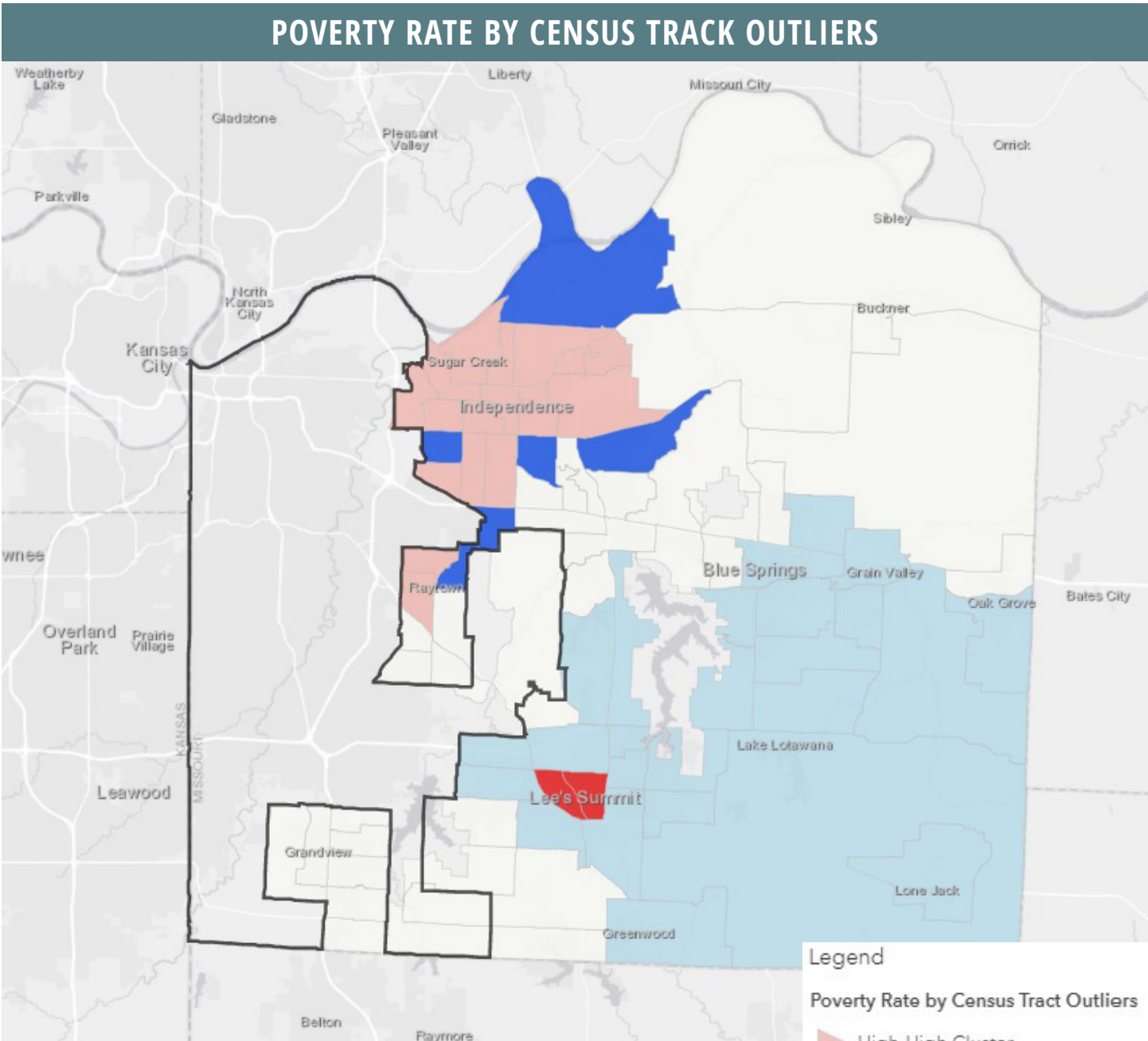
In EJC, higher poverty rates appear to be clustering in the inner, northwest corner of the region which borders Kansas City. This trend is seen throughout the country where suburbs that lie next to urban neighborhoods mirror their socioeconomic characteristics.

This map shows statistically-significant spatial clustering of poverty in EJC census tracts. The dark red cluster in the northwest corner indicates there is a 99% confidence the spatial clustering of poverty is significant.





An outlier analysis also revealed high-poverty census tracts within a larger, middle-income suburban community. The map below highlights two census tracts (180 and 137.03) in the suburb of Lee's Summit that had higher poverty rates in 2017 (12.6% and 24.7% respectively), compared to the surrounding areas. In Lee's Summit, the overall poverty rate is 5.2%.



The two census tracts that have a higher poverty rate than the rest of Lee's Summit are shown in bright red. The surrounding light blue area shows the relatively low poverty rates in the southeast. In the northwest, the light red show high poverty rates, with the census tracts colored in dark blue showing where there are areas with relatively lower poverty rates compared to their neighbors.

Poverty and Inequity

As poverty has spread to more people and places, it has also become more concentrated in already disadvantaged areas. People of color disproportionately face these challenges compared to white people in both urban and suburban areas.

According to census data from 2010-2014, poor Black people were more than five times as likely, and poor Hispanic people more than three times as likely, as poor white people to live in an extremely poor neighborhood (Knee-bone & Holmes, 2016). Concentrated poverty can be particularly damaging. Living in a high-poverty neighborhood poses many challenges including higher crime rates, lower performing schools, and fewer job opportunities. These challenges make it even harder for residents to escape poverty, and often ingrain poverty across generations (Kneebone and Holmes, 2016).

EJC appears to be following the national trend as there is a significantly higher proportion of non-white, Black, and Hispanic people living in poverty in census tracts with greater than 20% poverty (see Table 3). In addition, females living in poverty are more likely to live in high-poverty census tracts in EJC.

Again, these neighborhoods typically have a lower capacity to handle poverty. Therefore, fewer resources exist for poor suburban residents in these neighborhoods who are also more likely to be people of color.

Older vs. Newer Housing Census Tracts

Suburbs can often be characterized by their distance from an urban center and their age. Usually, suburbs closest to the urban center tend to be older, with houses built shortly after World War II, and a demographic make-up

TABLE 3

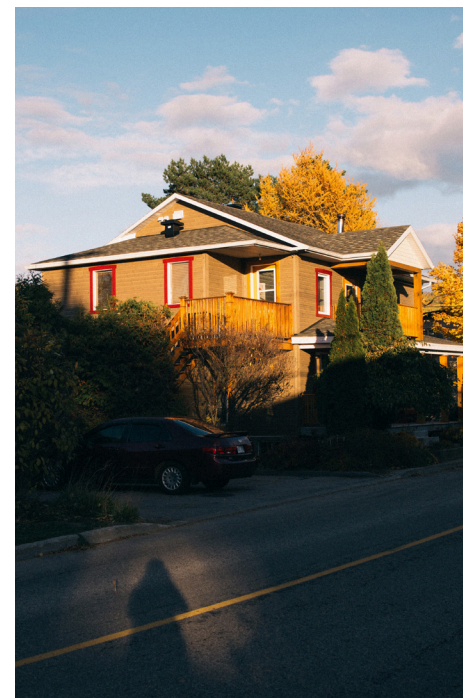
Differences in poverty rates among key demographic indicators for high-poverty census tracts (n = 13)^a

Indicator	Proportion in poverty (%)	p-value
SEX		<0.001
Female	29.2	
Male	23.7	
RACE - WHITE/BLACK		<0.001
Black	37.7	
White	22.8	
RACE - WHITE/NON-WHITE		<0.001
Non-White	39.9	
White alone	22.8	
ETHNICITY		<0.001
Hispanic/Latino	44.5	
Non-Hispanic/Latino	22.1	

^aEach p-value represents a hypothesis test of difference in population proportions with a 95% confidence level.

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similar to the urban center. Suburbs built more recently are typically farther away from the urban center, and are more likely to be predominantly white. National trends show poverty in both types of suburbs, and in some places it is rising faster in newer neighborhoods (Allard, 2017).



The Kansas City metro follows a similar trend, though the oldest suburbs still have much higher poverty rates. Inner-ring suburbs close to Kansas City encompass census tracts with a majority of older housing compared to the outer suburbs. As shown in the map below, older majority housing census tracts border urban Kansas City. These older, inner-ring census tracts have higher poverty rates than the outer census tracts which hold majority-newer housing. Older housing is considered as houses that were built prior to 1980 while newer housing was built after 1980.

For all of the census tracts with the majority of houses built before 1980, the poverty rate is 15.8%, while census tracts with the majority of housing built after 1980, the poverty rate is 5.4%. In addition, the poverty rate for older housing census tracts grew faster than newer housing tracts between 2010 and 2017.

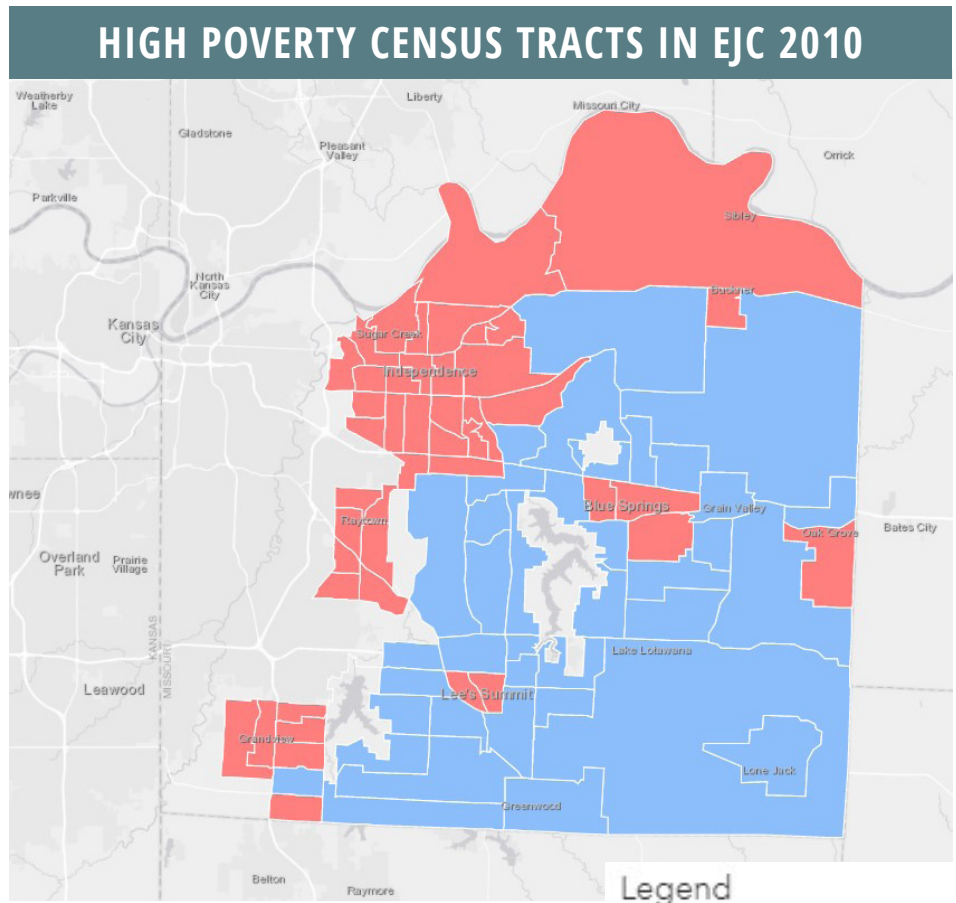
Average annual percent change for all majority older tracts = 2.57%

Average annual percent change for all majority newer tracts = 0.95%

Causes of Suburban Poverty

In addition to the effects of the Great Recession, researchers attribute multiple factors that could be driving suburban poverty including population changes between cities and suburbs, immigration, and the changing economy (Allard, 2017; Murphy & Allard, 2015; Kneebone, 2014).

A common argument for suburban areas such as EJC is that poorer residents from the nearby urban core migrate outward and therefore increase poverty rates in the outer edges of the metro. This argument is not supported by the data for EJC.



The census tracts in red hold majority older housing (built prior to 1980) while the blue census tracts hold majority newer housing (built after 1980).

Majority of houses built:
■ Before 1980
■ 1980 and After

First, migration from Kansas City proper to EJC has been steady, or even decreased - from 11,919 individuals in 2009 to 10,439 in 2017. Second, overall migration into EJC from any outside location has decreased steadily each year, from 54,193 individuals in 2010 to 42,946 in 2017. Third, and most importantly, the proportion of the population migrating into EJC living in poverty has decreased from 28.9% in 2010 to 16.6% in 2017, while the proportion possessing a bachelor's degree or higher has increased from 22.4% to 28.3%.

The proportion of the population migrating into EJC living in poverty has decreased from 28.9% in 2010 to 16.6% in 2017, while the proportion possessing a bachelor's degree or higher has increased from 22.4% to 28.3%.

Coupled with the fact that the overall poverty rate continues to increase, these trends suggest that dynamics within EJC suburbs are serving to



reinforce and deepen the local experience of poverty rather than low-income residents moving from Kansas City to EJC.

One reason for EJC's growing poverty rates could be the changing economic conditions of metropolitan Kansas City. Recent advances in automation and global trade have caused a decrease in the number of high-paying manufacturing jobs. Today, the U.S. is seeing a growing number of business/professional jobs as well as jobs in the service industry. Such a shift can pose difficulties as the education or training required for business/professional careers is expensive and service-providing jobs usually pay lower wages (Allard, 2017; Murphy & Allard, 2015; Kneebone, 2014).

The regional economy of Kansas City appears to be following this shift. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, from 2004 to 2018, the number of manufacturing employees decreased 7% in the metro while the number of professional/business employees increased 32% and service-providing employees increased 16%.

Though the decline in manufacturing was not as significant as the growth in other sectors, one could stand to reason there are a number of residents in the Kansas City area that cannot afford the required education for a busi-

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ness/professional type job. This could mean the available jobs are low-wage occupations that do not lift families out of poverty.

In addition to job availability, wage growth has been relatively stagnant for most American workers in recent decades, while the cost of living has gone up (Ross & Bateman, 2020). Median weekly wages, after accounting for inflation, have about the same purchasing power today as they did in 1979. The majority of Americans see an increase of about 2-3% in their pay year after year. The top 10% of earners, however, have seen their income increase by about 15% each year (Desilver, 2018). This gap has led to a wider margin in income inequality, which is especially pronounced for Black Americans. In fact, the wage gap between Black Americans and white Americans was wider in 2019, than it was in 2000 (Gould, 2020).

The Need for a Suburban Safety Net

Poverty research often focuses largely on urban - and many times rural - areas rather than suburbs. As a result, safety net programs and policies helping to lift people out of poverty such as

housing, food assistance, job training, etc., have focused mostly on cities and rural areas rather than on suburbs.

However, suburban poverty is a growing concern as residents are experiencing poverty rates similar to what can be seen in the urban core. In addition, poverty rates remain higher for people of color - the same patterns of racial inequality that is seen in cities have been replicated in suburbs.

The scope and strength of the safety net depends on what type of resources and nonprofits exist in and around communities. Nonprofits can function freely from the government, but are essential as connectors between those in need of assistance to the safety net. In fact, “each year the United States spends approximately \$150 billion to \$200 billion on social and human services,” and “most of these were delivered through nonprofit agencies.” (Kneebone and Berube, 2013 p. 62).

The nature of suburban areas makes it challenging to implement safety net programs. Unlike urban centers, suburbs have wide geographies with fewer safety net, or social service providers thus making it difficult to reach all who may be in need. Accordingly, we must find opportunities for coordination between safety net providers as well as policy solutions benefiting both urban and suburban residents in metropolitan areas.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shown how the safety net plays a powerful role in keeping people out of poverty. Unplanned life events e.g., illness, sudden death, loss of job, or natural disasters can quickly upend a family’s well-being with the potential result of them falling into poverty unexpectedly. Policies including raising the minimum wage, providing affordable and quality childcare, less re-

quirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid expansion are just a few policies that can be addressed to better connect the safety net to today’s realities.

In future studies, the Health Department will assess the existing safety net in EJC. With the COVID-19 pandemic causing increased unemployment, decreased revenue across many sectors, increased mental and behavioral health crises, and an overall increase in the use of the safety net, we hope to understand better where interventions are most needed. We will examine the demand, organizational capacity, and fragmentation between local and state governments and services as well as funding realities within EJC. The Health Department also recognizes that addressing the pressing health needs of the public requires us to look closely at the inherent inequities - including racial injustices - in our systems that play a dramatic role in those

health outcomes brought front and center by the pandemic. This calls for cross-sectoral collaboration between a number of sectors including public health, social services, other governmental agencies, and private institutions.

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