

PRESS RELEASE

Georgia, Louisiana, Texas organizations launch solutions-focused coalition to remove barriers within safety-net programs

ATLANTA, GA. (Feb. xx, 2021) – Today, the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF), the Pelican Institute for Public Policy (Pelican Institute) in Louisiana, and the Georgia Center for Opportunity (GCO) are proud to announce a new three-state initiative, whose goal is to promote solutions and build the political will to present and advance a comprehensive and compelling plan for reform to move people from dependence to the dignity of work.

Through this initiative, the organizations will help millions of poor Americans—disproportionately represented by people of color—over the coming decade by removing barriers to opportunity that exist in local communities, taking debates that often happen at the national level and drive them down to localities where the greatest assets reside: people, businesses, and communities of faith and common interest.

The tri-state initiative will promote policies that:

- Protect the right to earn a living and provide opportunities to pursue skilled jobs and careers.
- Help people move from dependency to the dignity of work and self-sufficiency.
- Build effective pre-trial diversion programs and positive pathways to re-entry for offenders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges for all Americans. The initiative partners say that amidst the chaos of the pandemic, a silver lining has been the renewed realization that the dignity of all human beings matters. Every citizen of this nation longs to live a life of purpose and belonging. The pandemic has also sensitized more Americans to the challenges of being without work or opportunity, and the corresponding impact this has on the dignity and self-worth of the individual.

The United States' current safety-net system has helped millions of people and prevented them from falling into abject poverty, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. But the organizations note that more money and more aid doesn't always lead to the outcomes desired. The initiative wants to give people the opportunity to move out of poverty and to experience the dignity of work and a job well done.

"The only thing bigger than the need for reform is the opportunity we have today to get it done," said TPPF Executive Director Kevin Roberts. "The pandemic and government-induced shutdowns have grown the problem beyond just generational poverty and now expose many more Americans to the prospect of long-term poverty. We must ensure that programs and policies are designed to get people out of dependence, into careers, and onto a path of prosperity."

"We believe there is a better way to solve the issue of generational poverty, one that is grown in our homes, neighborhoods, and local communities," said Pelican Institute CEO Daniel Erspamer. "It is this community-driven approach to poverty alleviation that creates true human flourishing. It views the problem of poverty as more than a material one, and it taps into the human spirit, expands human dignity, and unleashes human potential."

While the organizations recognize that not all work is equal, they note the desire to work is a common longing that reaches the core of our humanity. As Randy Hicks, President & CEO of the Georgia Center for Opportunity, says, "If we pause for just a minute to consider what's transpired in the past year, we will surely recognize that work is more than merely a source of income—it's often a source of pride, purpose,

and belonging as well. Government safety net programs must be addressed, so that they are inherently designed to move people to sustainability and self-sufficiency. Only when we focus on identifying how current efforts lock individuals and people groups into dependency can we focus on these solutions.”

The organizations listed the below principles upon which the three-state partnership is built:

1. Human dignity

We believe that each individual has inherent dignity. We believe that “dignity” includes the capacity for developing interconnected relationships and exerting agency through the development of one’s own gifts.

2. Community

It’s in our homes and neighborhoods where lives are formed, where we learn to love, trust, and live in community. And when things go wrong, it’s in those same homes and neighborhoods where lives are transformed.

3. Opportunity

While well-intentioned, the safety-net often turns into a snare net. For sure, it keeps many Americans from destitution, but through a complex web of rules that rob people of opportunity, it also often keeps them from rising above their circumstances. It makes poverty tolerable but not escapable. The safety net should catch those who are falling, but it should also set people back on their feet, on a pathway to dignity and human flourishing.

Long respected, TPPF, the Pelican Institute, and GCO recognize that a regional approach is needed to truly make an impact on the communities they serve. Texas, Louisiana, and Georgia share many similar demographics and challenges, and collaboration between the three state groups will be important to promoting lasting solutions.

This multi-state and multi-year initiative will present and advance a comprehensive and compelling plan for reform to move people from government dependence to the dignity of work. This includes policy changes to licensing, prisoner reentry efforts, welfare reforms, and many other policies that directly impact the opportunities available to those in poverty.

More research and policy development will be released by this coalition in the coming months. [Those interested can join the coalition’s mailing list](#) to stay up to date to learn what they can do to bring hope to those trapped in poverty.

###

Georgia Center for Opportunity (GCO) is independent, non-partisan, and solutions-focused. Our team is dedicated to creating opportunities for a quality education, fulfilling work, and a healthy family life for all Georgians. To achieve our mission, we research ways to help remove barriers to opportunity in each of these pathways, promote our solutions to policymakers and the public, and help effective and innovative social enterprises deliver results in their communities.