THE GEOGRAPHY OF OPPORTUNITY
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY IN MASSACHUSETTS

SUMMARY REPORT JAN 2009

The Geography of Opportunity
Building Communities of Opportunity in Massachusetts

Funded by
Massachusetts Legal Services Programs

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Building Communities of Opportunity in Massachusetts

Executive Summary

The following report assesses the “State of Opportunity” in Massachusetts. An “opportunity mapping” analysis was commissioned and funded by the Massachusetts Legal Services Programs.¹ Representatives of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute and the Legal Aid programs in Massachusetts worked with The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity at The Ohio State University to conduct the analysis. Opportunity mapping analyzes the distribution of opportunity in metropolitan areas utilizing state-of-the-art Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and extensive data sets.² The Kirwan Institute has become a national leader in conducting opportunity mapping to support social and racial justice initiatives.³

The goal of the Massachusetts opportunity mapping initiative was to understand how low-income groups and racial and ethnic populations were situated in the Commonwealth’s geography of opportunity. The initiative provides not only a tool to support advocacy and policy reform but also an

¹ For more information regarding the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, please visit: www.mlri.org/.
² For more information regarding the methodology of the Massachusetts opportunity mapping initiative and indicators used for the analysis, please see Appendix B.
³ For more information about the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity at The Ohio State University, please visit: www.kirwaninstitute.org. For more information regarding the Institute’s opportunity mapping initiatives, please visit: http://www.kirwaninstitute.org/research/gismapping/
analytical lens to view the challenges and potential remedies for legal aid clients in the State of Massachusetts.

A high quality education, a healthy and safe environment, sustainable employment, political empowerment and outlets for wealth-building are the essential opportunities needed to succeed, thrive and excel in our 21st-century society. Decades of social science research support the finding that neighborhood conditions play a substantial role in the life outcomes of inhabitants. Although individual characteristics play a role in determining who excels in our society, neighborhood conditions are critical in promoting or impeding people, even the most motivated individuals. The cumulative impact of having access to these levers of opportunity can be profound. Although personal motivation and individual determination can help people transcend the impediments in depressed communities, these strivers are the exception and not the norm. By assuring access to these critical opportunity structures we dramatically increase the likelihood that people can meet their full development potential, benefiting both the individual and society as a whole.

Unfortunately, access to these critical building blocks of opportunity is not equal or even possible for many people. This isolation from opportunity is even more pronounced for people living in low income communities, especially communities of color. Many low income communities are deprived of the essential elements needed to promote advancement and success in our society. The stakes are tremendous and have substantial impact on our society: will a child growing up in public housing in a distressed inner-city neighborhood end up in college, or victimized by crime or incarcerated? To remain economically vibrant, competitive and healthy, the Commonwealth must nurture and develop its most important asset, namely its people and human capital. The Commonwealth cannot achieve this goal unless it confronts these barriers to opportunity, which impede the success and development of so many of its residents.

Opportunity Mapping:

The opportunity mapping analysis demonstrated that:

1. Racialized isolation from neighborhoods of opportunity is very evident in Massachusetts. The degree of racial isolation in low opportunity areas in the Commonwealth is one of the highest rates of “opportunity segregation” found in an opportunity mapping analysis conducted by the Kirwan Institute. Substantial racial segregation can be found in the Commonwealth’s low opportunity communities for African-Americans and Latinos.
   - More than 90% of African-American and Latino households in 2000 were isolated in the lowest opportunity neighborhoods in the Commonwealth. The extent of isolation for African-American and Latino households was one of the highest rates of isolation recorded in any of our previous opportunity mapping analyses.
   - Some segregation was found for Asian households as well, with over 55% of Asian households found in low-opportunity communities.

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4 See Appendix C for a review of literature supporting the importance of neighborhood factors in predicting and impacting development and life outcomes.
5 All population figures cited in this section are derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2000 Census of Population and Housing. For all maps and analyses conducted as part of this initiative, please visit: http://www.kirwaninstitute.org/research/research-projects/massachusetts-neighborhood-opportunity-mapping-initiative/
• In contrast, only 31% of White, Non-Latino households were found in the low-opportunity communities.

2. Racial isolation into low-opportunity neighborhoods is far more pronounced than class based segregation into these low-opportunity communities. The finding suggests that while both race and class play a role in who has access to high-opportunity communities, race may play a stronger role than class in heightening isolation into low-opportunity neighborhoods in Massachusetts.

• Low-income Whites were not as concentrated in low-opportunity communities as other races. Only 42% of low-income White households were living in low-opportunity communities, while approximately 33% of low-income White households were living in high-opportunity communities. This concentration into low-opportunity neighborhoods was significantly more pronounced for low-income Asian, African-American and Latino households. More than 95% of low-income Latinos, 93% of low-income African Americans and 71% of low-income Asians were found in the State’s low-opportunity neighborhoods.

• This opportunity segregation was also found for high-income African-American and Latino households. Approximately 90% of high-income African-American and Latino households were isolated in low-opportunity neighborhoods, compared to just 20% of high-income White households. This shows empirically that higher incomes simply do not translate into increased neighborhood opportunities for people of color, highlighting the importance of both desegregating high-opportunity White areas, and bringing investment into distressed, racially-isolated communities.

3. Non-native born African and Latino residents were found to be disproportionately concentrated in low-opportunity neighborhoods in 2000.

• Non-native residents from Africa and Latin American were far more likely to be concentrated in the State’s low-opportunity neighborhoods than immigrants from Europe or Asia. Only 42% of European-born and 46% of Asian-born residents were found in the State’s low-opportunity neighborhoods. In contrast, over 70% of non-native born African and Latin American households were concentrated in the State’s low-opportunity neighborhoods.6

Analysis of Federally Subsidized Housing:

Due to the critical importance of affordable housing in providing access to opportunity, the Massachusetts opportunity mapping initiative also analyzed the current supply of subsidized housing in the State in relation to the condition of communities in which subsidized housing was found. Housing is more than just shelter – rather, it is a strategic intervention point into opportunity and advancement for marginalized populations. The results suggest that:

• Massachusetts’s federally subsidized housing supply is isolated from many high opportunity neighborhoods. The Commonwealth’s low-opportunity neighborhoods (which represent 2/5 of the total census tracts in the State) contained over three-fourths of the number of subsidized housing units in the HUD 2000 Picture of Subsidized

6 Non-native residents are defined as residents who self identified as “foreign born” in the 2000 Census.
Housing data set. Nearly 70% of the subsidized housing sites or projects in the State were found in the low-opportunity communities. While only 15,000 units of subsidized housing were located in the high opportunity communities, nearly 100,000 units were located in the low-opportunity communities.

**Recommendations:**

Massachusetts should adopt strategies to open up access to the “levers” of opportunity for marginalized individuals, families and communities. One model of remedying opportunity isolation is the “Communities of Opportunity” model, a fair-housing and community development framework that attempts to remedy these disparities while growing opportunity for all people in the region. The model emphasizes investments in people, places, and linkages. Massachusetts can build human capital through improved wealth-building, educational achievement, and social and political empowerment.

Massachusetts should:

- support neighborhood development and reinvestment initiatives that attract jobs with living wages and advancement opportunities;
- demand high-quality local services for all neighborhoods, including high-performing local public schools;
- encourage better links among people and places, fostering mobility through high-quality public transportation services and region-wide housing mobility programs;
- and manage sprawling growth, in order to reduce the drain of jobs and resources from existing communities.

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7 For more information about the HUD 2000 Picture of Subsidized Housing dataset, please visit the following website: [http://www.huduser.org/picture2000/](http://www.huduser.org/picture2000/)
Map 1: Comprehensive Opportunity Map
STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS

This map displays the spatial pattern of distribution of opportunity based on Education, Economic & Mobility, and Housing & Neighborhood indicators.

Source: US Census 2000; County Business Pattern; ESRI; EPA; Massachusetts Department of Education; MA State Police.
Date: July 17, 2008

Legend
- Major Cities
- Freeway System
- Opportunity Index
  - Very Low Opportunity
  - Low Opportunity
  - Moderate Opportunity
  - High Opportunity
  - Very High Opportunity
  - No Data
- Counties
- State Boundaries

Map showing various cities, including Boston, Worcester, Springfield, Cambridge, Providence, Nashua, and others, with varying shades indicating different opportunity indices.
Map 3: Comprehensive Opportunity Map with non-White population overlay

STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS

This map displays the spatial pattern of distribution of opportunity in Massachusetts based on Education, Economic & Mobility, and Housing & Neighborhood indicators, overlaid with non-White population.

Source: US Census 2000; EPA; MA State Police; HUD  Date: July 17, 2008
Map 4: Comprehensive Opportunity Map with Subsidized Housing overlay

STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS

This map displays the spatial pattern of distribution of opportunity in Massachusetts based on Education, Economic & Mobility, and Housing & Neighborhood indicators, overlaid with subsidized housing locations.

Source: US Census 2000; EPA; MA State Police; HUD  Date: July 17, 2008
Map 5: Comprehensive Opportunity Map with Foreclosure overlay
STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS

This map displays the spatial pattern of distribution of opportunity based on Education, Economic & Mobility, and Housing & Neighborhood indicators, overlaid with the number of foreclosures.

Source: US Census 2000; County Business Pattern; ESRI; EPA; Massachusetts Department of Education; MA State Police; HUD Date: January 7, 2009

Legend
- Major Cities
- Freeway System

Number of Foreclosures
- 0 - 49
- 50 - 99
- 100 - 149
- 150 - 199
- 200 - 250

Opportunity Index
Comprehensive Opportunity
- Very Low Opportunity
- Low Opportunity
- Moderate Opportunity
- High Opportunity
- Very High Opportunity
- No Data
- Counties
Appendix A:

Supporting Tables and Maps

**Table 1: Proportion of total households by race, by neighborhood opportunity analysis ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood type</th>
<th>White (Non Latino)</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low and Very Low Opp.</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Opportunity</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High and Very High Opp.</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Proportion of total households by race and income, by neighborhood opportunity analysis ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood type</th>
<th>White (Non-Latino)</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low and Very Low Opp.</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Opportunity</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High and Very High Opp.</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Proportion of total non-native born households by continent of origin, by neighborhood opportunity analysis ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood type</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low and Very Low Opp.</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Opportunity</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High and Very High Opp.</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 presents the analysis of the distribution of racial populations (households by race) within the neighborhood opportunity categories.

Table 2 presents an analysis of both race and class within the neighborhood opportunity categories.

Table 3 presents an analysis of place of origin for foreign born residents within the neighborhood opportunity categories.
Table 4 presents an analysis of subsidized housing locations from the HUD 2000 Picture of Subsidized housing within the neighborhood opportunity categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood type</th>
<th># Projects</th>
<th># Units</th>
<th>% Projects</th>
<th>% Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low and Very Low Opp.</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>98,846</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Opportunity</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>16,106</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High and Very High Opp.</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>15,671</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Distribution of subsidized housing, From HUD's 2000 Picture of Subsidized Housing by neighborhood opportunity analysis ranking