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## Report calls W.Va.'s racial disparities 'catastrophic'

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Black West Virginia residents face higher rates of poverty, unemployment, infant mortality and incarceration than white residents do, according to a report released Tuesday.

Authors of the report -- which calls the disparities "catastrophic" -- say all of West Virginia pays the price when such inequities exist.

"It isn't just an issue that people of color have," said the Rev. James Patterson, executive director of the [Partnership of African American Churches](#). "It's an issue that impacts and actually costs the whole of West Virginia society."

The report was a project of the partnership, the [West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy](#), and the [American Friends Service Committee's West Virginia Economic Justice Project](#).

A November report commissioned by the group [Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health across West Virginia](#) found similar results in Kanawha County.

The report released Tuesday, called "Legacy of Inequality: Racial and Economic Disparities in West Virginia," examines the entire state. It also includes a history of brief history of blacks in the Mountain State.

"It is my hope that people will read this report and that it will move them to action," Patterson said.

The report says Americans have a "powerful predisposition ... to view issues of inequality in terms of the personal traits of those involved," but "this approach is inadequate to account for such massive and systemic inequalities."

According to the report, which is based on [U.S. Census Bureau](#) data:

- Whites and blacks in West Virginia have higher poverty rates than the national average, but more than 28 percent of blacks are in poverty, compared to more than 16 percent of whites.

Black children under age 5 are more than twice as likely as white children to be poor.

- Per capita income for blacks is less than \$15,000, which is 30 percent lower than that of whites. Almost a third of blacks work in service occupations, compared to 17 percent of whites.
- About 6 percent of whites are unemployed, compared to almost 9 percent of blacks.

The unemployment rate of black males is 11 percent, compared to nearly 7 percent for white males.

- About 2.2 percent of all blacks in West Virginia are incarcerated, compared to 0.4 percent of whites.
- The infant mortality rate -- the proportion of children who die before their first birthday -- for blacks is 60 percent higher than for whites, and worse than in many developing countries.
- Educational attainment is one area where less disparity exists. Nearly 29 percent of blacks have some college education or an associate's degree, compared to about 23 percent of whites.

About 17 percent of whites have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to about 14 percent of

blacks.

Ted Boettner, executive director of the Center on Budget and Policy, said many of the disparities could be connected to the fact that blacks are underrepresented in higher-paying jobs.

Among other policy suggestions, the report recommends creating a state Office of Minority Affairs to coordinate programs aimed at eliminating racial disparities; devoting state money to economic development and housing programs in black communities; and enacting a State Earned Income Tax Credit, a tax credit for low-income workers.

Patterson said it is often difficult for minorities in West Virginia to bring their issues to the forefront. Blacks make up slightly more than 3 percent of the state's population, according to the Census Bureau.

"It's just because of the demographics of the state. Systems that are in place tend to stay in place," he said. "And they tend to maintain the status quo."

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