

Case Brief: Poverty and Its Impact on Urban Communities

Lauren Gonzalez-Perez |

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ISSUE

Poverty is one of the most persistent challenges in communities across the United States, particularly in urban areas like Lynwood and Compton, where inequality is highly visible. Despite the wealth of our nation, many families struggle to make ends meet, with housing costs, healthcare, and education often out of reach. Growing up in a low-income Hispanic household in Lynwood, I have personally witnessed how poverty affects families' stability and opportunities. Many relatives and neighbors live in overcrowded homes, move frequently, and face the stress of financial insecurity, which impacts children's schooling and social development.

The burden of poverty disproportionately affects Hispanic communities, immigrants, and single-parent households. In my community, high rents, limited access to healthcare, and underfunded schools reinforce cycles of hardship. Structural challenges, such as stagnant wages and limited affordable housing, make it nearly impossible for many families to climb the economic ladder. As sociologist Matthew Desmond observes, poverty "isn't just a lack of money, but a lack of fairness and opportunity built into the systems we rely on" (Desmond, 2016). Seeing this firsthand has made it clear that addressing poverty requires systemic solutions that go beyond temporary relief and create real opportunity for families like mine.

ANALYSIS

Across the United States, multiple programs aim to address poverty, but their effectiveness is limited. Food assistance programs like SNAP, housing subsidies, and Medicaid provide essential support, yet they often fail to reach everyone who needs help. In Lynwood and nearby Compton, many families qualify for aid but face bureaucratic hurdles or long waiting lists, leaving gaps in essential support.

Welfare reform under TANF attempted to promote self-sufficiency, but strict eligibility rules and work requirements have left some families without assistance, especially in areas where jobs are scarce or low-paying. Even programs that succeed in helping some residents often do not tackle the structural causes of poverty, such as unequal access to quality education and affordable housing.

Housing programs, such as Section 8 vouchers, have helped many families secure shelter, yet demand far outstrips supply. In my neighborhood, waiting lists for housing assistance stretch for years, forcing families to live in overcrowded apartments or with relatives. Rising rents further limit housing options, keeping many families in precarious living situations.

Minimum wage increases have attempted to improve financial stability, but wages have not kept pace with living costs. Many working families in Lynwood must juggle multiple jobs just to afford rent, utilities, and transportation. While these programs reduce extreme poverty, they rarely create long-term opportunities for upward mobility.

The result is a cycle of hardship that affects generations. Families struggle to pay rent, access healthcare, and provide educational support for their children. Addressing poverty meaningfully in communities like mine requires integrated solutions that address housing, income, healthcare, and education simultaneously.

PROPOSAL

To address poverty in Lynwood and nearby Compton, I propose a Comprehensive Equity and Opportunity Program (CEOP) that combines housing, income support, healthcare, and education into a single, coordinated system. Rather than addressing symptoms separately, CEOP would provide a holistic approach aimed at breaking generational cycles of poverty.

First, CEOP would implement a Universal Housing Guarantee, converting vacant properties and underutilized commercial spaces into affordable housing. Families in Lynwood, including my own extended family, would gain stability, reducing overcrowding and allowing children to remain in the same schools. On-site community resources, such as childcare, job training, and healthcare clinics, would accompany housing, supporting families' long-term growth.

Second, CEOP would introduce a Living Wage Index, adjusting wages based on local costs for housing, healthcare, and basic necessities. This would allow families to earn a sustainable income without working multiple jobs, giving parents more time for their children and personal development. Job training and apprenticeship programs would prepare residents for higher-paying work, breaking cycles of low-wage employment.

Third, CEOP would provide universal healthcare and mental health services, ensuring families can receive care without financial burden. Preventive healthcare and access to mental health support would reduce long-term consequences of untreated illness, a challenge I have seen affect many in my neighborhood.

Finally, education reform would focus on equitable funding, mentorship, and after-school programs, giving children in Lynwood and Compton the tools to succeed academically and socially, leveling the playing field with wealthier districts.

By linking housing, income, healthcare, and education, CEOP addresses poverty systemically, rather than superficially. This integrated approach would give families the resources and stability to move from surviving to thriving.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Implementing CEOP in Lynwood would directly transform the lives of my community. Many families, including my own, struggle with rising rents, housing instability, and limited access to education and healthcare. Converting vacant buildings into affordable housing would immediately reduce overcrowding and homelessness, while revitalizing neglected areas into vibrant community hubs.

The Living Wage Index would allow parents to earn enough income to meet basic needs without juggling multiple jobs, fostering family stability and reducing stress. By incentivizing local businesses to participate through tax benefits and community partnerships, the policy could be sustainable while boosting local economic growth.

Expanding access to healthcare and mental health services would relieve pressure on emergency rooms, which are often the only option for uninsured residents. Families could receive preventive care, treatment for chronic conditions, and mental health support, improving overall well-being and productivity.

Education reform under CEOP would directly benefit children in Lynwood, including my younger relatives, by providing after-school programs, mentorship opportunities, and updated technology. These resources would give students the tools to succeed academically and pursue higher education or vocational opportunities, breaking the cycle of poverty.

Key stakeholders in implementation would include city officials, local nonprofits, schools, healthcare providers, and community members. Effective communication could involve multilingual outreach campaigns, community meetings, and collaboration with trusted neighborhood organizations.

While challenges remain, such as funding, long-term maintenance, and equitable allocation, CEOP's holistic approach could fundamentally reshape my community, ensuring that opportunity, equity, and dignity are accessible to all families, not just a privileged few. By addressing the structural roots of poverty, Lynwood could become a place where children grow up with real chances to succeed, and families like mine can thrive rather than simply survive.

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