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Strong Training Systems and Robust Workforce Supports Needed to Improve Economic Stability of Mississippi's Working Families

New MEPC Report Provides Recommendations to Help Low-Income Families Succeed

JACKSON – Almost forty percent of working families in the state are low-income and more than half of all working families in Mississippi have a parent with no more than a high school education, a newly released report from the Mississippi Economic Policy Center (MEPC) found. The report contains a wide-ranging set of policy recommendations aimed at workforce training, workforce supports and economic development and can be found at www.mepconline.org.

Increasing the Return: Investing in Mississippi's Working Families is the first report to be issued by the newly formed Mississippi Economic Policy Center. The MEPC is an independent, non-partisan initiative that engages in rigorous, accessible and timely analysis to inform the public policy debate on issues that affect the economic and social well being of working families and low-wealth Mississippians. MEPC is managed by the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta with key partners including the Mississippi Center for Justice and other organizations.

The major findings of the MEPC report are:

- 129,457 (or 39 percent) of working families in Mississippi are low-income;
- 56.1 percent of all working families in Mississippi have a parent with no post-secondary education;
- Mississippi annually spends an average of \$6.52 per adult without a high school education on adult education activities – well below amounts spent by other Mid-South states;
- 54,515 Mississippians hold more than one job; and
- 282,751 working Mississippians were employed in occupations that typically pay below poverty-level wages.

“Despite working hard, many Mississippi families are low-income. To increase economic opportunities for Mississippi's working families, efforts are needed to expand access to post secondary training, align economic development incentives to target working families and

provide critical workforce supports,” said Ed Sivak, director of the Mississippi Economic Policy Center.

The major MEPC policy recommendations are:

- Double the available resources for Adult Education from \$6.52 to \$13.00 per adult without a high school education or equivalency.
- Strengthen training options available to Mississippi’s unemployed workers by targeting more WIA and TANF resources towards education and training by doubling the rate of participants in training programs over the next three years.
- Enhance data collection and reporting systems to assess the effectiveness of training systems in their ability to move low-wage Mississippians up the economic ladder.
- Release an annual report on the use of public incentives to generate quality jobs by employers. The report should be posted in aggregate form on the Mississippi Development Authority Web site to encourage legislative and programmatic accountability.
- Update deduction and exemption amounts within the income tax system to account for inflation, thus preventing people in poverty from spending limited incomes on a tax.

“By strengthening existing training systems, targeting resources towards innovative and permissible training activities and enhancing workforce supports, Mississippi could improve the economic stability of thousands of working families,” said Joseph Larry, Program Specialist with the Workforce Career Technical Education Division of the Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges. “Simultaneously, a coordinated training strategy focused on the jobs of today and tomorrow could build a workforce that actively competes and succeeds in the global economy. “

The MEPC intends to follow-up the *Increasing the Return: Investing in Mississippi’s Working Families* report with several other reports due out this spring and summer, including:

- A primer on Mississippi’s budget and tax systems;
- An analysis on the effects of a state Earned Income Tax Credit;
- An analysis of predatory lending and foreclosure trends in Mississippi; and
- A report on the importance of early childhood education for working families and economic development.

Increasing the Return: Investing in Mississippi’s Working Families is part of the Working Poor Families Project, a national initiative of the Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Joyce and Charles Stewart Mott Foundations. The project examines state-level policies and programs targeting or affecting low-income working families.

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