

SMALLER INDUSTRIAL CITIES OFFER WALKABLE HAVEN FOR FAMILIES, NEW

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For Immediate Release

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Smaller Industrial Cities Offer Walkable Haven for Families, New Report Says

OAKLAND, Calif. – Families looking for walkable and vibrant hometowns could help lead the nation's smaller industrial cities toward a just and fair economic renewal, according to a report released today by PolicyLink, a national urban policy organization.

Cities like Scranton, Pa., Kalamazoo, Mich., and Youngstown, Ohio, are increasingly seen as the "best of both worlds"—simultaneously offering many of the amenities of big cities and the community-spirit of small-towns, according to the report, *To Be Strong Again: Renewing the Promise of Smaller Industrial Cities* (available at <http://www.policylink.org/ToBeStrongAgain.pdf>).

Environmental awareness and sky-high gas prices are fueling growing interest in our nation's urban centers – a recent Coldwell-Banker survey showed 80 percent of respondents were thinking about moving into an urban area for a shorter commute. Home to nearly 7.5 million people – more than Los Angeles and Chicago combined – the 151 smaller industrial cities identified nationwide have many of the assets and amenities to capitalize on this trend: walkable downtowns, historic architecture, unparalleled waterfronts and parks, colleges and universities, and grand cultural institutions.

"These cities are right out of Goldilocks – not too big, not too small, just right," said Radhika Fox, PolicyLink associate director and the report's co-author. "Smaller industrial cities once powered the America's economy, growing and sustaining a stable middle class in our nation. But with the right mix of public and private investment, these cities can once again be hometowns for all people."

Smart and bold local leadership in these cities have made them incubators of some of the nation's most innovative public policy ideas, bringing opportunity and hope to all their residents. Unlike fast-gentrifying cities like San Francisco, New York and Washington, these cities are well-positioned to be places of shared prosperity for families of all income levels.

To make this opportunity real, however, these cities will need some state and federal help, the report finds. Decades of economic disinvestment and a lack of national attention have left many of these cities blighted and their residents disconnected from true opportunity – particularly those from low-income communities and communities of color. Some local leaders, though, have already shown tremendous progress:

- In Kalamazoo, Mich., the Kalamazoo Promise is promoting economic recovery and educational equity by providing guaranteed college scholarships to all graduates of the city's public school system.
- In Youngstown, Ohio, the Business Incubator gives home-grown, young innovators and entrepreneurs-focused on business-to-business software-the support and mentorship they need to succeed.
- In Scranton, Penn., blighted parks have been reclaimed to offer beautiful civic gathering places, improve surrounding property values, and draw families seeking a sense of community in traditional neighborhoods.

"America cannot afford to leave our cities in the shadows," said Mayor Christopher Doherty of Scranton, Penn. "Our people have the skills, the tools and the drive to serve as beacons for just, fair and equitable redevelopment. We will be strong again."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Cities prominently highlighted in the report include Youngstown, Ohio; Flint and Kalamazoo, Mich.; Binghamton, Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Utica and Syracuse, NY; Scranton, Allentown and Reading, Pa.; and Fall River, New Bedford and Lawrence, Mass.

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works. Our work is guided by the belief that those closest to the nation's challenges are central to the search for solutions. With offices in Oakland, New York, New Orleans and Los Angeles, PolicyLink is a leader in the national equity movement. For more information, please visit www.policylink.org

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