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## Editors' Note

**Imagine the moment** just before a child is born. At that fateful time, suppose the stork sits the child down and says, "It's your fate to be born into a low-income family. As compensation, however, I'll let you choose the state where your family lives." Which state should the child choose? We dedicate the current issue of *Pathways* to the simple proposition that the child's answer to the stork's question is quite consequential.

Why do states matter so much for poverty? Although states of course have very different economies, what's more striking is their self-consciously different antipoverty policies. For most federal safety net programs, such as food stamps, TANF, or Medicaid, the federal government sets baseline rules and guidelines and doles out the cash, but the implementation of these programs varies considerably by state. Furthermore, most states, counties, and cities have come up with their own antipoverty programs, some of which are very creative.

For those familiar with a more centralized nation-state, a first inclination is often to cry foul. It's not fair, it is typically argued, that our children's fates depend so much on the luck of the draw, on whether the stork lands in California, Texas, Massachusetts, or Georgia. And indeed it's *not* fair by virtually any conceivable understanding of fairness.

There is, nonetheless, a small silver lining. When states and localities are allowed to approach poverty differently, one can learn from the resulting variation in results. We've asked our contributors to exploit this variation by examining some of the most interesting states and cases and weighing in on what can be learned from them. Which states or cities are doing promising work? Which states are failures? And how might the successes be generalized and the failures avoided?

In our first contribution, James M. Quane and William Julius Wilson discuss the Harlem Children's Zone, arguably one of the most celebrated antipoverty interventions of our time. We then asked Kristin Morse and Veronica White to explore how New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's equally famous brainchild, the Center for Economic Opportunity, has taken on poverty and inequality. The third piece, authored by Timothy M. Smeeding and Joanna Y. Marks, features the ruthlessly pragmatic and science-driven antipoverty interventions coming out of Wisconsin. We then conclude with an essay by Katherine S. Newman and Rourke L. O'Brien that provides us with an object Southern lesson in how not to address poverty.

Throughout these pieces, an important theme is the tradeoff between liberty and fairness that a decentralized poverty regime entails, a tradeoff that's cast in sharp relief because some states decide to run especially anemic poverty-reduction programs. When children grow up in these states, they are permanently harmed in ways that cost them and the country dearly. Indeed, the costs may be so high that it's fair to ask whether states' rights should trump our twofold commitment to (a) treat children fairly and equally and (b) reduce collectively-borne externalities (e.g., reductions in labor force productivity). If the current *Pathways* issue is at all successful, it will open up a conversation not just about high-payoff new programs but also about this intrinsic liberty-fairness tradeoff and how best to resolve it.

—David Grusky & Christopher Wimer, Senior Editors