



MA ranks third in Nation in new measure of opportunity in USA

November 29, 2011

(BOSTON, MA) The State of Massachusetts has come in third in the nation on a groundbreaking new measure designed to indicate how effectively individuals living in a state can move up the economic ladders of society as compared to the rest of the country.

The measure, called the Opportunity Index, pulls together more than a dozen data points to rank every state by awarding a first of its kind Opportunity Score. The Index is designed to empower community leaders, engaged citizens, and elected officials at all levels to become knowledgeable of the overall opportunity they are providing to those living in their region. It will be issued annually, giving leaders a way to track progress and measure the effectiveness of their efforts. Developed jointly by Opportunity Nation and the American Human Development Project, the Index is available online, for free in a user-friendly and interactive format at www.opportunityindex.org.

"Opportunity Nation starts from the belief that the zip code you're born into shouldn't pre-determine your destiny," said Mark Edwards, executive director of Opportunity Nation. "For too long we have sliced and diced the interconnected issues of education, jobs, families, and communities – the framework underlying the idea of opportunity – into narrow silos that are disconnected. The reality is that these factors work in tandem to determine the potential success of our citizenry. That's what the Opportunity Index provides – an unprecedented snapshot of what opportunity in America looks like at the local, state and national levels."

Massachusetts outperformed almost every other states in the union, earning an Opportunity Score of 80.9 out of 100. A few of the highlights that helped set Massachusetts apart include:

- **Weathering the Economic Downturn:** During a time when a majority of the country is struggling to make ends meet, Massachusetts residents earn a higher on average income than most Americans (\$64,496 vs. \$51,425) and their statewide poverty rate is just over 10% compared to the national average of 13.47%.
- **Excelling in Education at All Levels:** Massachusetts has nearly 60% of children enrolled in preschool, one of the highest on-time high school graduation rates (81%), and one of the largest percentages of adults with bachelor degrees (37%).
- **Strong Communities:** Communities across the state provide exceptional access to health care and healthy food and have nearly 95% of teenagers enrolled in school.

"Having scored above the national average in many metrics used to formulate their Opportunity Score, Massachusetts is clearly an opportunity leader and has put the building blocks in place for their residents to succeed," said Edwards. "Providing quality education, sound economies, and safe communities are the stepping stones to economic mobility in this country, and Massachusetts's leaders deserve particular commendation for their work."

These are just a few of the comparable metrics that helped propel Massachusetts to the top of the Opportunity Index. The Index culls together data from almost a dozen different sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and other official sources. Complete metrics and scores can be found at www.opportunityindex.org.

The Opportunity Index reveals some interesting new facts:

- Income is surprisingly not the strongest indicator of opportunity. Nevada has higher than average median household income, but ranks last in the nation in opportunity due to low scores in education, community dimensions.
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- Income is surprisingly not the strongest indicator of opportunity. Nevada has higher than average median household income, but ranks last in the nation in opportunity due to low scores in education, community dimensions.
- The strongest indicator of an area with high-opportunity is youth academic and economic inclusion. Conversely, states with a higher percentage of "Teenagers (16-19) Not in School and Not Working" have low opportunity.
- States with low opportunity scores tend to have higher military recruitment rates.
- The fifteen highest scoring states are fairly evenly distributed across the nation. Five are from the Northeast, five are from the Midwest, three are in the South Atlantic region, and two are Western states.
- Of the lowest-scoring 15 states, 12 are located in America's South. The remaining three are Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada.

Opportunity Nation is a broad-based, cross-partisan coalition of nearly 200 public, private, non-profit, civilian and military organizations working together to ensure that every citizen that works hard can achieve their full potential. The diverse group of organizations have joined together to restore access to the American Dream by collectively creating and advocating for an agenda that provides better skills, quality jobs, and stronger communities to all Americans. Over the coming months, Opportunity Nation will leverage the collective support from its cross-partisan coalition and work to engage elected officials at all levels of government, as well as the candidates running for presidential in 2012.

"At a time when many Americans are worried about how they're going to pay next month's bills, Washington is stuck in political gridlock and doing nothing to relieve these very real fears," said Kevin Jennings, CEO of Be the Change, Inc., the parent organization behind Opportunity Nation. "The Opportunity Nation campaign is the start of a dialogue to change all of that. We have a plan for ensuring that every American has access to the American Dream now and into the future, and we're going to be asking every elected official and candidate for office next year, What's Your Plan for Restoring Opportunity to Americans?" with high-opportunity is youth academic and economic inclusion. Conversely, states with a higher percentage of "Teenagers (16-19) Not in School and Not Working" have low opportunity.

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