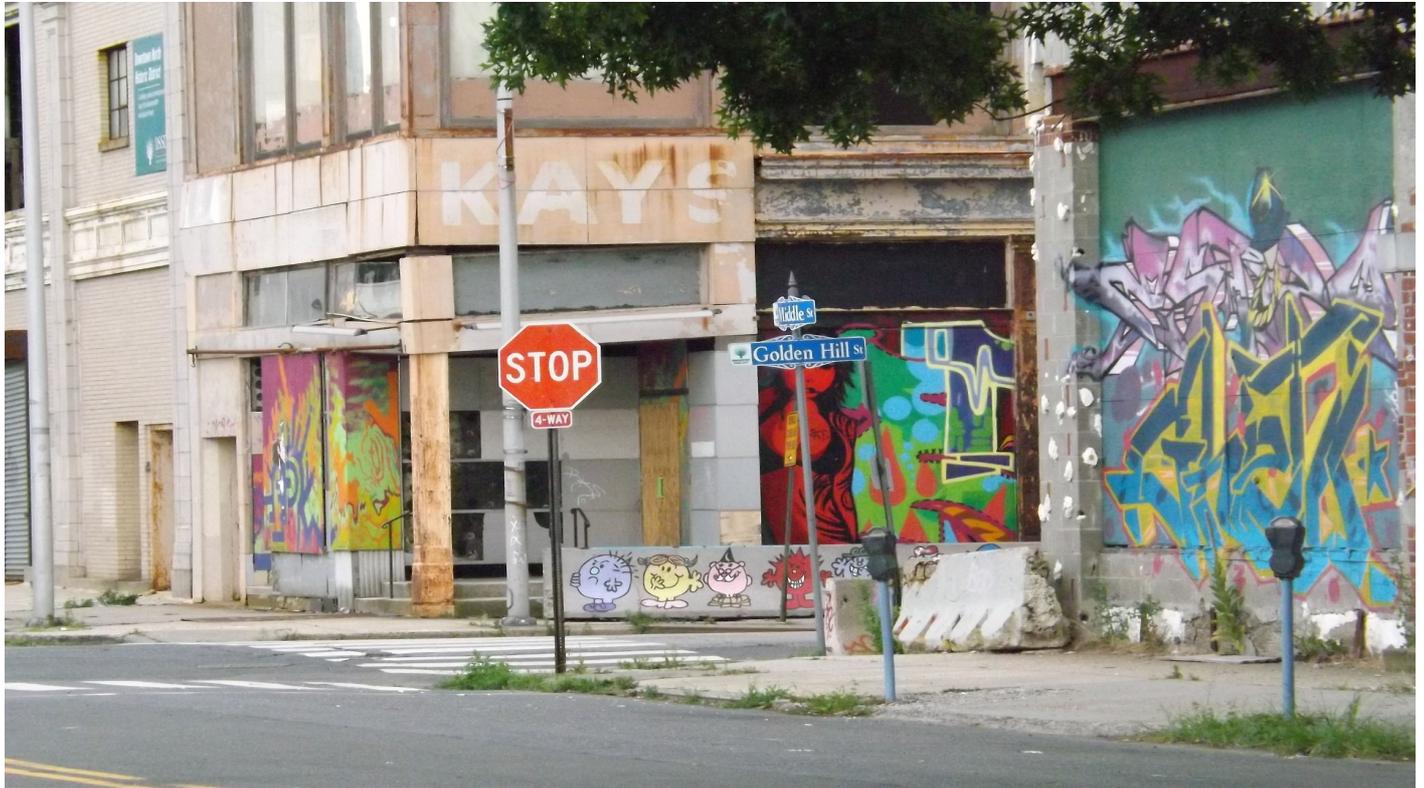




Missouri Should Be Measuring Intergenerational Poverty, but How We Do It Matters

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Recently, [legislation](#) was introduced that would require a study by the Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS) to measure intergenerational poverty. Under this bill, DSS would determine “how many recipients of benefits or services...are the children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren of individuals who also received such benefits or services.”

Distinguishing between short-term and long-term poverty could be a wise move, but how valuable would a single snapshot be in describing a multi-generational problem? Not very. While Missouri should know who is receiving entitlements and for how long, there is a better way to collect that information than what is being proposed.

[Utah's Intergenerational Poverty Initiative](#) is now in its seventh year and has five years of data that allows the state to more accurately measure intergenerational poverty and the success of its various anti-poverty efforts. It also has a [data dashboard](#) that shows current data and the trends in intergenerational poverty since 2014. Unfortunately, similarly precise information is unavailable for Missouri, although there are ways to approximate the extent of cyclical poverty in our state.

For example, in my recent [essays](#), “Intergenerational Poverty in Missouri” and “Creating Pathways for Self-Sufficiency,” I estimated the scope of intergenerational poverty in Missouri

with a combination of U.S. Census data and economic mobility data. Such extrapolation gives us a general picture of intergenerational poverty in Missouri, but detailed and up-to-date data would be that much more helpful for policymaking purposes.

The years of data Utah has is important for establishing trends, measuring the effectiveness of programs, and having the ability to direct resources to where they could do the most good—in other words, making the most out of the state’s anti-poverty spending. It is doubtful any of that could be accomplished by the singular study that would be commissioned by this bill.

If Missouri’s policymakers are serious about addressing intergenerational poverty and making wise use of welfare expenditures, they should consider a longer-term initiative like Utah’s. As I explain in my essays, intergenerational poverty harms not just those trapped in poverty, but also the rest of the state via costly welfare spending and slower growth. Ongoing data collection could be well worth the investment if Missouri would use that information to effectively and efficiently move people up and out of poverty.

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Emily Stahly is an analyst at the Show-Me Institute. She earned her B.A. in politics from Hillsdale College in Michigan and is researching education with the Show-Me Institute.

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[2] <https://house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills181/hlrbillspdf/6488H.021.pdf>

[3] <https://jobs.utah.gov/edo/intergenerational/index.html>

[4] <https://embed.resultsscorecard.com/Scorecard/Embed/34330>

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