

HUD secretary announces 8 new Promise Zone designations

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FILE - In this March 18, 2015 file photo, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro arrives at a reception in Washington. Castro announced Tuesday, April 28, 2015 that six metropolitan areas, one rural region and one tribal community have been designated as Promise Zones under an Obama administration program that seeks to revitalize high-poverty communities.

ANDREW HARNIK, FILE — AP Photo

ST. LOUIS — Six metropolitan areas, one rural region and one tribal community have been designated as Promise Zones under an Obama administration program that seeks to revitalize high-poverty communities.

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro announced the new Promise Zone designations Tuesday after touring a job-training center in St. Louis, one of the eight new participants in the program that began last year. The program seeks to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, improve health and reduce violent crime.

The other new Promise Zones are Camden, New Jersey; Hartford, Connecticut; Indianapolis; Minneapolis; Sacramento, California; the Low Country of South Carolina; and Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in South Dakota.

The designation does not include any direct federal money but gives impoverished areas of the communities a leg up in obtaining federal assistance. U.S. Rep. William Lacy Clay, a St. Louis Democrat, said the Promise Zone "means that our region will receive preferential access for grant applications, technical assistance and other help from 12 different federal agencies who administer 35 different programs."

Castro said administration officials will be monitoring to see if the program works in the designated communities.

"We're getting better in public service about measuring outcomes," Castro said. "So we're not just looking at the inputs. We want to see, at the end of the day, what is the outcome that you're getting through the expenditure of resource."

The first Promise Zone designations, announced last year, were San Antonio, Texas; Los Angeles; Philadelphia; Southeastern Kentucky Highlands; and Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The St. Louis Promise Zone includes mostly-black areas of St. Louis city and county, where unemployment is high, violent crime is high, and schools are troubled by low performance. The area includes part of Ferguson, where racial disparities were highlighted in the unrest following last summer's fatal shooting of Michael Brown, a black 18-year-old, by a white police officer.

The eight new Promise Zone designations were selected from 123 applications.