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Welcoming remarks by President James Bullard
Research Symposium: The Balance Sheets of Younger Americans
Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis—The Center for Household Financial Stability
May 8-9, 2014

Welcome, and thank you for joining us for the 2nd annual balance sheet research symposium sponsored by the Center for Household Financial Stability, which the St. Louis Fed launched in May of last year.

The center is pleased to co-sponsor today's event with our Research department, where I got my start here at the St. Louis Fed, as well as with the center's partner, the Center for Social Development at Washington University. The Washington University center will offer its own welcome just before the dinner reception at 5:00.

As most of you know, our Center for Household Financial Stability is researching family balance sheets with the aim of strengthening both families and the economy. Because of the financial crisis and Great Recession, our framework and analysis must now not only consider what families save and own, but what they owe as well—their entire balance sheet. Indeed, the Great Recession has been called a “balance sheet recession,” so it's critical for us to understand the role that balance sheets played in bringing down families and the economy and the role that these balance sheets will play in building them back up.

Today's symposium is focused on younger Americans, those in their 20s and 30s, because our research and the research of others have shown that, compared with middle-aged and older Americans, young people lost the most wealth from the recession and have been, by far, the slowest to recover it. Moreover, since 1989, while middle-aged Americans have increased their wealth by about two-thirds and older Americans have nearly doubled their wealth, younger Americans have actually lost about 10 percent of their wealth in real terms. Not surprisingly, studies, including some of our own, suggest that younger Americans are not likely to surpass the wealth accumulated by their parents or grandparents—a historical first.

So that's why we're here—to better understand what's going on with the balance sheets of younger Americans and to draw out the implications of the research presented here for future research, community development and public policy.

Speaking of public policy, we are taking our findings to Washington. As a follow-up to this symposium, the center—in partnership with the New America Foundation and a group called Young Invincibles—is sponsoring a policy symposium titled “Millennials After the Great

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Recession” on Oct. 16 and 17 in D.C. We’ll examine not just balance sheets but issues that impact, and are impacted by, balance sheets—unemployment and under-employment, workforce development, work-family balance, cradle to college education, health care and technology. The challenges are many and significant, and we hope to look at them holistically. Stay tuned.

Looking further ahead, to next April, the Federal Reserve System will host its biennial community development research conference, this one around the timely theme of economic mobility. In partnership with the Fed’s Board of Governors, we will play a leadership role in this important conference. For further information, please see the Call for Papers in your packets. We hope you’ll consider submitting an abstract or paper.

Over the next two days, you will be exposed to a thought-provoking lineup of papers and speakers. During a break, you might also want to pick up a copy of the essay from the St. Louis Fed’s 2012 annual report, which is dedicated to this topic.

I’m eager to listen and learn, as I’m sure you are. Let’s get started, and thank you again for joining us.

James Bullard, President and CEO
Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis