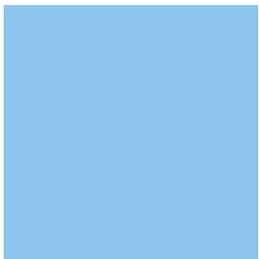
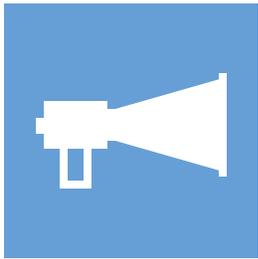
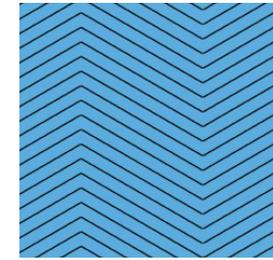
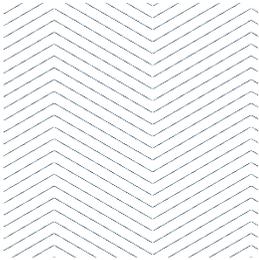
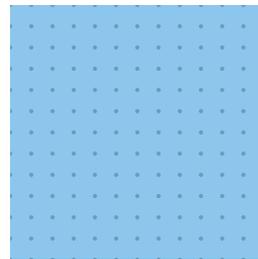


# UNITED WAY FOR SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN 2021 POLICY AGENDA



**WE ADVOCATE FOR  
POLICIES THAT CHANGE  
OUR COMMUNITY FOR  
THE BETTER.**



**United Way  
for Southeastern Michigan**

# CONTENTS

3  
**WHY  
WE ADVOCATE**

4  
**WHAT WE  
ADVOCATE  
FOR**

5  
**POLICY PRIORITY:  
THE ALICE BUDGET**

6  
FOOD  
HOUSING  
AND UTILITIES  
TRANSPORTATION

7  
CHILD CARE  
HEALTH CARE  
TECHNOLOGY  
TAXES

8  
**POLICY PRIORITY:  
INCOME AND  
ECONOMIC MOBILITY**

9  
EDUCATION  
POST-SECONDARY  
EDUCATION AND  
SKILLS TRAINING  
ECONOMIC  
STABILITY

10  
**POLICY PRIORITY:  
EQUITY, INCLUSION  
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



# WHY WE ADVOCATE

Advocacy is a core part of United Way for Southeastern Michigan's efforts to build strong, equitable communities where households are stable and every child can thrive.

While our investments in direct services and partnerships help meet the immediate needs of metro Detroit families, good public policy is crucial to addressing the root causes of need and inequity. We work to raise local, state, and federal policymakers' awareness of the daily struggles of Southeastern Michigan families, and we advocate to help them make informed decisions that align with our mission to improve lives in our community.

Together, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to use our voices to break down barriers to success and create meaningful, sustainable change.

# WHAT WE ADVOCATE FOR

Our advocacy efforts are informed by our work in the community and the Michigan ALICE Report, which shows us that nearly 40 percent of households in Southeastern Michigan do not earn enough to cover the cost of a basic household budget. This staggering number lives at the heart of our agenda, which focuses on policies that remove systemic barriers to financial stability and close the gap between earnings and expenses.

Additionally, Black, Hispanic and other non-white Michigan households are more likely to live below the ALICE survivability threshold. We advocate for policies that address the realities of racial inequality in our region. Recognizing how public policy has contributed to the growing disparity, we work to combat discrimination against people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and creeds and advocate for policies designed to deconstruct centuries of systemic racism and institutional bias, which harm people in our community every day.

WE WILL  
ADVANCE  
OUR POLICY  
GOALS BY:



Building relationships and sharing information and data with elected leaders at the local, state, and federal levels.



Researching, analyzing and tracking proposed legislation, executive orders and administrative rules to determine the potential impact on those we serve.



Urging legislators to vote in a manner that protects the best interests of all people and the well-being of our community.



Raising community awareness of proposed policy changes and coordinating grassroots efforts to speak out in support or opposition.



# POLICY PRIORITY: THE ALICE BUDGET

The Michigan ALICE Report shows that the basic cost of living – measured by the no-frills cost of housing, food, health care, child care, transportation, taxes and technology – is far outpacing household income for more than one in three families in our state.

To build a community of stable households where children can thrive, we advocate for policies that ensure an effective safety net for households during times of crisis and provide a path to financial stability by reducing the economic burden on working families.



## HOUSING AND UTILITIES

To strengthen household budgets and keep more families in their homes, we must expand housing assistance, reduce the costs of utilities, and guarantee access to safe drinking water. We advocate to:

- Increase measures to prevent eviction and foreclosure.
- Expand water and utility shutoff avoidance policies.
- Protect and improve utility payment support programs such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Michigan Energy Assistance Program.



## FOOD

Families must have reliable and consistent access to nutritious food that meets the needs of everyone in the household. We advocate to:

- Expand access to school meals, including universal access to school breakfast.
- Renew the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act with increases to nutritional guidelines and accessibility for all children.
- Preserve and improve food security programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; the Women, Infants, and Children Program; and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.



## TRANSPORTATION

People must have safe, reliable transportation to access work, education, health care and community activities. We advocate to:

- Improve access to public transit options in Southeastern Michigan.
- Reduce the cost of existing transit options.





## CHILD CARE



Child care is the largest expense in the budgets of families with young children, often forcing parents and caregivers to choose between paying for care or forgoing steady employment. Ensuring equitable access to quality, affordable child care options is essential to increase opportunities for stable work and provide children the best possible start in life. We advocate to:

- Expand income eligibility for child care subsidies so more households with income below the ALICE threshold can access assistance.
- Increase reimbursement rates for child care providers who are also often living below the ALICE threshold.
- Establish universal preschool in Michigan.

## HEALTH CARE



Access to comprehensive and affordable health care is essential to ensure the wellbeing of families and children in our region. Too often, lack of access to health care services creates barriers to household stability. We advocate to:

- Ensure equal access to mental health services.
- Expand dental and vision Medicaid programs.
- Defend and expand the consumer protections and safeguards created by the Affordable Care Act.

## TECHNOLOGY

Access to technology is imperative for workers and their families to navigate schooling, health care and work and succeed in the modern economy. We advocate to:

- Close the digital divide by expanding affordability of and access to broadband in underserved communities.



## TAXES



As a result of inequitable tax structures, low- and moderate-income working families pay a disproportionate amount of their total incomes in taxes. To reduce this burden on household budgets, we advocate to:

- Increase and expand both the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Make federal COVID-19 relief expansions to the Child Tax Credit permanent.
- Increase funding for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance so more households can access free tax preparation services.





# POLICY PRIORITY: INCOME AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY

While ensuring immediate access to basic needs is crucial for households whose incomes fall below the ALICE threshold, we also advocate for policies that increase household income and economic mobility.

In 2019, despite 10 years of economic growth, more than half of all jobs in Michigan still paid less than \$20 per hour. In Southeastern Michigan, a household with two working adults and two children needs to make at least \$38 an hour in combined income to afford their basic needs. Expanded access to good-paying jobs plays a major role in reducing the number of households living below the ALICE threshold.

We advocate for policies that improve access to quality education, post-secondary education and skills training, and other income supports.



### EDUCATION



Educational attainment has a direct link to earnings over one's lifetime. We believe learning begins at birth and every child is entitled to a nurturing environment and high-quality education that prepares them to succeed. We advocate to:

- Establish an equitable school funding formula that meets the needs of all kids, including appropriate funding for special education and support services across all schools in Michigan.
- Provide schools with the resources they need to ensure all children are reading at the appropriate level by third grade.
- Encourage and increase restorative justice alternatives to expulsion and suspension so that no child is denied an education because of behavioral issues.
- Institute an impartial regulatory body to coordinate school opening and closing and enrollment procedures across all public school governance types.
- Provide funding for the Community Schools program, which ensures comprehensive academic, social, and health services that result in improved educational outcomes.

### ECONOMIC STABILITY

Many households with incomes below the ALICE threshold live one emergency away from being pushed into financial crisis. Policies that support a sustainable living wage and preserve a robust safety net for households in times of need are necessary to foster economic growth and mobility. We advocate to:

- Ensure workers can earn paid time off so they can take care of themselves or sick family members without losing pay.
- Prevent the expansion of predatory loan practices, which aggressively siphon money from households and communities.
- Institute a step-down system to fix the "benefits cliff," which penalizes families who have secured steady employment by immediately and substantially reducing benefits, resulting in a net reduction in income.
- Create an environment in which every worker can earn a living wage as defined in the ALICE report.



### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING

Not all educational opportunities look the same for working Michiganders. We believe in increasing access to post-secondary education and skills training through support of wraparound services and non-traditional educational programs. We advocate to:

- Increase access to post-secondary education, skills training, and credentialing programs like MI Opportunity, MI Reconnect, and Futures for Frontliners.
- Provide wraparound services like child care and income supports for participants of post-secondary and skills training programs.
- Increase availability of career and technical education programs to provide students with multiple pathways to a living wage as adults.



# POLICY PRIORITY: EQUITY, INCLUSION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Removing barriers that create inequitable systems is key not only to individual success but the success of our region. We advocate for policies that deconstruct the systemic racism and institutional bias that have been built over generations, including unfettered access to educational, employment, and civic engagement opportunities.

We advocate to:

- Promote participation in the Michigan redistricting process to ensure all communities of interest have their voice heard.
- Protect the unfettered right to vote, including:
  - Ensuring access to absentee voting.
  - Making it easier to register to vote.
  - Educating the public about polling and election information, as well as voter rights.
  - Ensuring our elections remain accessible and secure for all.
- Opposing unnecessary restrictions and bureaucratic processes between the voter and the ballot.

SIGN UP FOR POLICY UPDATES AND TAKE ACTION WITH US AT

**StandWithUnitedWay.org**



**United Way  
for Southeastern Michigan**