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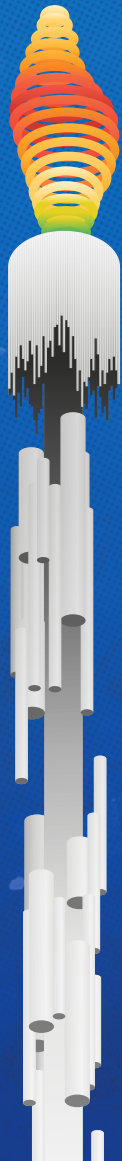
United Way
for Southeastern Michigan

POLICY AGENDA

UNITED WAY FOR SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN

We advocate for policies that **change our community** for the better.

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WHY WE ADVOCATE



Advocacy is a vital part of United Way for Southeastern Michigan's work 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 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 **nearly 40%** of southeastern Michigan households don't earn enough to cover the cost of a basic household budget.

This staggering number lives at the heart of our agenda, which focuses on removing systemic barriers to economic mobility 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 survival 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 advance our policy goals by:



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



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



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



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



POLICY PRIORITY: THE ALICE BUDGET



The ALICE Report shows the basic cost of living – determined by measuring the lowest costs 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 an equitable 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 economic mobility by reducing the financial burden on working families.

One way we do this is by advocating for the ALICE threshold to be used to determine eligibility for safety net programs, ensuring households can afford all of their basic needs before vital supports are eliminated.





CHILD CARE

Child care is the largest household expense for families with young children, often forcing parents and caregivers to choose between paying for care or forgoing steady employment.

We advocate to:

- Ensure equitable access to quality, affordable child care options to increase opportunities for stable work and provide children the best possible start in life.
- 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 often living below the ALICE threshold.
- Establish universal preschool in Michigan.



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.



HEALTH CARE

Access to comprehensive and affordable health care is essential to ensure the well-being 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 access to dental and vision care through Medicaid and other programs.
- Defend and expand the consumer protections and safeguards created by the Affordable Care Act.





HOUSING & UTILITIES

To strengthen household budgets and keep more families in their homes, we must expand housing assistance, reduce the cost 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.
- Remove barriers to affordable housing by expanding eviction expungement and eliminating source of income discrimination.



TAXES

As a result of the current inequitable tax structure, low- and moderate-income working families pay a disproportionate amount of their total incomes in taxes. We aim to reduce this burden.

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.



TECHNOLOGY

Access to technology is imperative for workers and their families to navigate school studies, health care information and work to succeed in the modern economy.

We advocate to:

- Close the digital divide by increasing affordability and expanding access to underserved communities.
- Ensure access to technology necessary to engage in a digital world, especially for students.



TRANSPORTATION

People need safe, reliable transportation to access work, education, health care and community activities.

We advocate to:

- Reduce the cost of existing transit options.
- Improve access to and increase the quality of public transit options in southeastern Michigan.
- Support programs such as Ride United that help people get to work or job interviews when other transit options aren't available.



POLICY PRIORITY: INCOME & ECONOMIC MOBILITY



While ensuring an effective, sustainable safety net is crucial, we also advocate for policies that will increase incomes and economic mobility of households living below the ALICE threshold.

According to the ALICE report, despite 10 years of economic growth, more than half of all jobs in Michigan still paid less than \$20 per hour in 2019. In southeastern Michigan, a household with two working adults and two children needs to make at least \$38 an hour in combined income just 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 convene and lead a statewide workforce coalition thanks to a National Skills Coalition grant, and together we advocate for policies that improve access to quality education, post-secondary education and skills training, and other income supports.





EDUCATION

Educational attainment is directly linked to earnings over one's lifetime. We know that 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 openings and closings, 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.



POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION & SKILLS TRAINING

Not all educational opportunities look the same for working Michiganders. To provide multiple paths to success, we must increase 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 quality credentialing programs through MI Reconnect.
- Invest in workers by expanding and securing additional funding for wraparound services like child care, transportation and income supports for participants of post-secondary and skills-training programs, enabling them to complete their goals.
- Support funding for career and technical education programs for youth, those with disabilities, veterans, returning citizens and other nontraditional groups that will create multiple pathways to good-paying jobs.
- Grow, diversify and expand innovative earn-and-learn opportunities, including apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs in high-demand fields.
- Provide sufficient funding for a linked data system across education, workforce and human services to support transparent, secure and inclusive data analysis.





ECONOMIC STABILITY

Many households with incomes below the ALICE threshold live one emergency away from 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.



POLICY PRIORITY: COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, ENGAGEMENT & EQUITY



Removing barriers that drive inequity is key to promoting individual success and the success of our region. We advocate for policies that deconstruct the systemic racism and institutional biases that have been built over generations, including unfettered access to educational, employment and civic engagement opportunities.





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & VOTING RIGHTS

We are committed to uplifting community voice through civic engagement and robust participation in all elections.

We **advocate** to:

- Protect the unfettered right to vote and ensure access to absentee voting.
- Make it easier to register to vote.
- Educate the public about polling and election information, as well as voter rights.
- Ensure our elections remain accessible and secure for all.
- Oppose unnecessary restrictions and bureaucratic processes between the voter and the ballot.



REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE

The gun violence crisis in the United States cuts innocent lives short and devastates communities. No one should fear for their safety when going to a grocery store, movie theater or concert. No child should face each school day afraid that someone will harm them, their teachers or their classmates.

We **advocate** to:

- Partner with experts to identify opportunities to leverage our network and platform to drive meaningful impact on this issue.
- Pass common-sense reforms that will reduce the risk of gun violence to our children, in our classrooms and in our communities.





Sign up for policy updates and take action with us at StandWithUnitedWay.org.



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