

2025-26



UNITED WAY
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 our work to build strong communities as we help families move from crisis to stability, and from stability to prosperity.

While our investments in local human services help meet immediate needs across our region, good public policy is crucial to addressing the root causes of those needs. We seek to ensure policymakers at all levels of government understand the daily struggles faced by Southeastern Michigan families, and we advocate for decisions that will remove barriers to success and improve lives. We believe that **United Is The Way™**, and that together, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to use our voices to create meaningful, sustainable change, lighting the way to a brighter future for all of us.





WHAT WE ADVOCATE FOR

Our advocacy efforts are informed by our work in the community and rooted in the Michigan ALICE Report.

This study, which compares earnings to the cost of living, shows that nearly 42% of households in Southeastern Michigan don't earn enough to cover the cost of a basic monthly budget. This staggering number lives at the heart of our policy agenda, which focuses on promoting economic mobility and closing the gap between income and expenses. The report also shows that while an unacceptable number of people in every community are struggling to make ends meet, there are significant disparities when the data is analyzed by age, race, and gender, with traditionally marginalized groups being far more likely to fall below the ALICE survival threshold. We work to engage our community and shed light on these disparities as we advocate for policies that will deconstruct systemic barriers to success and ensure every family has the opportunity to prosper.

We **advance our policy goals** by:

Leveraging a broad network of nonprofit, corporate, and community partners to advance shared policy priorities.



Building relationships and sharing information and data with elected leaders.



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



Analyzing and tracking policy proposals, executive orders, and administrative rules to determine the impact on 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 ALICE Report shows that the basic cost of living – based on the lowest possible cost of housing, food, health care, child care, transportation, taxes, and technology – outpaces household income for more than one in three families in our state.

To build an equitable community where families have the ability to move from crisis to prosperity, we advocate for policies that ensure an effective safety net for households during times of crisis, lower the cost of living for working families, and provide a path to economic mobility. One way we do this is by urging state and federal government agencies to use the ALICE threshold when determining who is eligible for assistance programs, instead of using measures like the federal poverty line, which don't adequately account for the different costs of living across states and regions.





CHILD CARE

Child care is the largest household expense for families with young children across the United States, often forcing parents and caregivers to choose between paying for care or leaving a steady job.

We advocate to:

- Ensure access to affordable, quality child care and preschool through programs that include Great Start to Quality and universal PreK, to foster the best possible growth and development for children.
- 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 often live below the ALICE threshold, to grow availability and ensure quality of care.



FOOD

In Michigan, one in six children faced hunger in 2022. Families must have reliable and consistent access to nutritious food that meets the needs of everyone in the household.

We advocate to:

- Preserve universal access to free, healthy school meals.
- Renew and expand the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act to include more stringent nutritional guidelines, and lower eligibility thresholds to increase accessibility for all children.
- Preserve and expand food security programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; the Women, Infants, and Children program; and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.
- Eliminate existing barriers and prevent the creation of new barriers to essential programs that promote food security.



HEALTH CARE

More than 430,000 Michigan residents lacked health insurance in 2023. Without comprehensive and affordable health care, families' physical and financial health suffers.

We advocate to:

- Promote equitable access to mental health services, including services in schools.
- Protect and 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.
- Increase and safeguard the Healthy Michigan Plan and access to quality, affordable health insurance for all.





HOUSING & UTILITIES

To strengthen household budgets and reduce housing insecurity, we must expand rent and mortgage assistance, reduce the cost of utilities, and guarantee access to safe, affordable drinking water.

We advocate to:

- Increase measures to prevent eviction and foreclosure, and discriminatory rental practices.
- Protect and expand water and utility shutoff avoidance policies to include more families living below the ALICE threshold.
- Protect and improve utility payment support programs, such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Michigan Energy Assistance Program.
- Establish a state water affordability system.
- Expand investment in the development and availability of affordable housing units.



TAXES

Current tax structure results in low- and moderate-income working families paying a disproportionately high portion of their total incomes in taxes than those with higher incomes.

We advocate to:

- Increase funding for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance so more households can access free tax preparation services.
- Promote tax credits that help move families from below the ALICE threshold toward financial stability and prosperity.
- Restore the expanded federal Child Tax Credit.
- Establish a state Child Tax Credit.



TECHNOLOGY

Access to technology is essential for connecting to and navigating school, work, and health care systems.

We advocate to:

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



TRANSPORTATION

Safe, reliable transportation is vital to accessing 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 foster economic mobility for households living below the ALICE threshold.

Three quarters of the most common jobs in Michigan continued to pay less than \$20 per hour in 2022. 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. Thanks to a National Skills Coalition grant, we convene and lead a statewide workforce coalition that advocates for policies that improve access to quality education, post-secondary education and skills training, and other income supports.





EDUCATION

Education is directly linked to earnings over one's lifetime. We know that learning begins at birth, and we believe 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.
- 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, closings, and enrollment procedures across all public-school governance types.
- Ensure that schools provide students with comprehensive academic, social, and health supports by funding for the Community Schools program, which contributes to achievement in the classroom and prosperity in life.
- Increase investment in quality out-of-school and summertime educational and enrichment opportunities for all students.



POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION & SKILLS TRAINING

Not all educational opportunities look the same for working Michigan residents. To provide multiple pathways to success, we must increase access to post-secondary education and skills training through wraparound services and nontraditional educational programs.

We advocate to:

- Increase access to post-secondary education, skills training, and quality credentialing programs like Michigan Reconnect.
- Invest in workers and enable them to complete their goals by expanding and securing additional funding for wraparound services, including child care, transportation, and income support for participants of post-secondary and skills-training programs.
- 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 as well as more efficient and effective service delivery.





ECONOMIC STABILITY

Many households with incomes below the ALICE threshold live one emergency away from financial crisis. To help families in times of need, we support policies that promote a sustainable living wage and preserve a robust safety net to foster economic growth and mobility.

We advocate to:

- Create an environment in which every worker can earn a living wage as defined in the ALICE Report.
- 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.
- Advance policies that support the growth and sustainability of the nonprofit human service sector to meet the daily needs of residents, while being prepared to respond in times of community crisis.





POLICY PRIORITY: COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, ENGAGEMENT & EQUITY

Removing systemic barriers is key to promoting success for the entire region. We advocate for policies that deconstruct systemic and institutional biases to ensure equitable access to educational, employment, and civic engagement opportunities.





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & VOTING RIGHTS

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

We advocate to:

- Protect the unfettered right to vote and ensure Michigan residents access to absentee and early voting.
- Make it easier for citizens to register to vote.
- Educate the public about polling, election information, and voting rights.
- Oppose unnecessary restrictions and bureaucratic barriers that keep eligible voters from casting a ballot.



PROMOTING HEALTH, SAFETY & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

We believe every household deserves to prosper. We must work with our neighbors to build resilient communities that are more connected, supportive, and ready to respond to any challenge, be it a natural disaster, economic crisis, or public health emergency.

We advocate to:

- Promote funding for backbone community services, including Michigan 2-1-1.
- 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.