

PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

2016 PUBLIC POLICY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA “UNITED AGAINST POVERTY”



The 2016 Louisiana State Legislative Session is scheduled to convene at noon on Monday, March 14th with final adjournment no later than 6:00 p.m. on Monday, June 6th.

United Way of Southeast Louisiana knows “**Poverty**” is the fundamental issue in our seven-parish region. We have a bold new vision aimed at eradicating poverty, “Equitable communities where all individuals are healthy, educated and economically stable.” Our 2016 Public Policy Legislative Agenda “United Against Poverty”, is a key strategy in our new *Blueprint for Prosperity* which serves to advance our objectives to eradicate poverty and to assist those on the cusp of poverty or **ALICE**---**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed. ALICE is a term to describe residents across Louisiana who are working hard, yet still struggling to make ends meet. ALICE has low-paying jobs, little or no savings, and is one emergency from falling into poverty. Our “United Against Poverty” Public Policy Agenda reaffirms UWSELA’s positions previously taken in the 2014 and 2015 Louisiana Legislative Sessions. We hope it encourages others to focus on public policy and adopt the *Blueprint for Prosperity*, our poverty eradication agenda. Together we can educate and empower people to help lift them out of poverty. We can create a stronger, better Louisiana.

EDUCATION

INCREASED INVESTMENT IN HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILD CARE (Ready Louisiana)

UWSELA is a member of Ready LA and will continue to partner with them for increased investment in high quality early childcare to ensure that children enter school ready to learn. ACT 3 of 2012, passed by the Louisiana Legislature, mandated an overhaul of the current early learning system. The estimated \$208 million needed by 2020 to make these crucial changes for our youngest students has been hard to come by. Deep budget cuts have forced lawmakers to put off allocating funds towards this vital initiative. It is our goal to help change that so more parents can be productive members of the workforce and more young Louisiana children can get the start they deserve.

GREATER EXPECTATIONS

Greater Expectation’s mission is to help support the implementation of higher standards in the public schools of southeast Louisiana. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) replaced the state’s Common Core standards by approving the Louisiana State Student Standards in English, language arts, and mathematics - unique state standards developed through a collaborative statewide process which included extensive public input and the work of Louisiana educator-led committees. UWSELA and United Way Worldwide (UWW) launched an initiative to support parents and teachers of southeast Louisiana in the implementation of higher K-12 standards. Working in collaboration with education, business, and community leaders, UWSELA’s Greater Expectations initiative focuses on supporting families and schools to help ensure that K-12 students are better prepared for life and work. UWSELA is also teaming with community organizations and education advocates across the state to share online resources that the Louisiana Department of Education has developed to help families and educators to better understand the forthcoming PARCC student reports. The Greater Expectations website can be viewed at www.louisianastandards.org.

ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS (Licensure)

RoadMap to Success coalition’s goal is to ensure that all of Louisiana’s children in paid childcare settings enter kindergarten ready to learn! Louisiana is lagging behind other states in requiring safety and accountability among small childcare businesses. State regulation is needed to assure uniform, high quality standards for children in small childcare settings. UWSELA will remain part of this coalition to improve oversight and support for small childcare providers across the state and work to ensure that all of Louisiana’s children in paid childcare settings enter kindergarten ready to learn.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

EXPANDING EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (HB5)

HB5 by Representative Walt Leger is a proposed law to increase the amount of the state earned income tax credit from 3.5% to 7% of the federal tax credit for working families. Louisiana was the first southern state to adopt the bipartisan EITC. It is one of the most important policies we can support to assist our financially struggling families from falling into poverty, **ALICE**--**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed. With the help of Louisiana's EITC, low and moderate-income working families get to keep more of what they earn to help meet basic needs and pay for things that allow them to keep working such as child care and transportation. Children in families that claim the EITC do better and go further in school, which allows them to work more and earn more as adults.

INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Louisiana's current minimum wage is \$7.50. UWSELA will continue to advocate for a minimum wage increase up to \$9.

PREDATORY PAYDAY LENDING (Capping interest rate at 36%)

Predatory payday lending is designed to trap borrowers in long-term cycles of debt. The annual percentage rate for a predatory payday loan in Louisiana is 780 percent, compared to an annual percentage rate of 24 percent for major credit cards. This predatory lending exploits Louisiana's working poor and can trap them in a debt spiral that leads to ever deepening indebtedness and, in some cases, personal bankruptcy. UWSELA and collaborative partners will advocate to cap finance charges for predatory payday lenders at the equivalent of 36 APR as a means of protecting consumers from predatory business practices.

GENDER-BASED WAGE DISPARITY (HB397 and HB450)

A woman in Louisiana earns about 67 cents for every \$1 a man earns. The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) opposed equal pay last year claiming existing law provided redress for equal pay disparities; however, the legislature passed a new law which only included state employees after non-state employees were removed from the bill. UWSELA will support legislation that discourages wage disparity on the basis of gender. Louisiana ranks worst in the country on equal pay for women.

HEALTH

WHOLE CHILD HEALTH – (SCR34)

SCR34 by retired Senator David Heitmeier requested that the Department of Health and Hospitals, the Department of Education, the Medicaid managed care organizations, and representatives of the Whole Child Initiative work together to develop a plan to implement the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model developed by the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention. UWSELA will continue to support these school-based primary care initiatives for children.

MEDICAID EXPANSION

Governor Edwards signed an executive order making Louisiana the 31st state to expand Medicaid. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that 364,000 low income adults will qualify for the expansion. The state will spend approximately \$1.2 billion over 10 years to implement the expansion. The Louisiana Hospital Association's members will pay for a portion of the state's costs to hire 248 new workers to handle the Medicaid patient enrollment. If the state had not expanded Medicaid, it would have lost out on \$15.8 billion in federal Medicaid funding and an additional \$8 billion in hospital reimbursements over the same 10 year period. The expansion is expected to lower hospitals' uncompensated care costs, of which the state and local governments in Louisiana cover only one-third. The expansion will lower the percentage of uninsured working adults in Louisiana from 16.3% to 9.8%. UWSELA will support legislation which funds the administrative and enrollment costs associated with Medicaid expansion.

BREAST CANCER TREATMENT ALTERNATIVES INSURANCE (HB694)

Women are not being informed of all of their treatment options following a diagnosis of breast cancer. UWSELA will continue the efforts of the Women's Leadership Council (WLC) to assure that women are informed of all options, including the availability of insured coverage for restorative surgeries following mastectomies in accordance with the Federal Women's Health & Cancer Rights Act and state law.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (SB162, HB135, SB123 and HB780)

The Center for Disease Control reports that, apart from deaths and injuries, physical violence by an intimate partner is associated with a number of adverse health outcomes. One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, but more than half of women on welfare are abuse survivors. Abused women often miss work or perform poorly due to partner sabotage. Economic abuse – preventing a partner from getting or keeping work – often co-exists with other forms of domestic violence. This leads to a vicious cycle: Abuse harms its victims financially, but victims don't leave their abusers because they don't believe they can support themselves. UWSELA has supported over 50 changes to laws assisting victims of domestic violence in the 2014 and 2015 sessions and will support the following legislation in the 2016 session:

- SB162 – to allow prior acts of abuse to be admissible in criminal prosecutions and civil proceedings
- HB135 and HB624 – to mandate reporting of certain adjudications to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry by city & parish courts
- SB123 – to provide the same conditions of bail to acts of domestic abuse, stalking and sexual assault
- HB780 – to provide a mechanism for the transfer, safekeeping and return of firearms to prohibited domestic violence possessors (proposed by the Louisiana Sheriff's Association)
- HB931 – to require completion of intervention programs and to increase sentences for patterns of abuse perpetrated to control victims.

OTHER ISSUES

LOUISIANA INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

Continue to work in partnership with Judge Madeleine Landrieu and Judge Nancy Konrad to expand services for Children Aging out of Foster Care. We are currently evaluating national best practices that could possibly increase federal funding to assist with improving outcomes for youth leaving foster care, meaning they turned 18 years old before being connected to a permanent family through adoption, returning home to parents, or having a relative take custody of them. Studies show that young people who age out of foster care without permanent connections have very poor outcomes compared to their peers, including increased incidence of homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system and lower educational achievement. UWSELA's Women's Leadership Council is a \$25,000 contributor to the initiative to provide familial, community and state support to these children. UWSELA will support legislation which serves to fund and protect children who age out of foster care.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING (HB262 and SB191)

Poverty makes youth vulnerable to human trafficking and unsafe employment situations. In cooperation with Covenant House, UWSELA will support HB262 which raises the threshold age of the victim from 18 to 21 for certain elements and penalty provisions of the crimes of human trafficking and trafficking of children for sexual purposes. UWSELA will also support legislation which prohibits the employment of persons under age 21 as strippers in bars and night clubs serving alcohol.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (SB301, SB302, SB303 and SB324)

The Louisiana Youth Justice Coalition's legislative agenda seeks to improve problems within the juvenile justice system. UWSELA will monitor and support SB 301, 302, 303 and 324 which strive to limit the detention of non-violent juvenile offenders, to encourage participation in drug courts, to keep certain juvenile offenders out of adult prisons, to allow juvenile records to be accessible to legal guardians, institutions and agencies to which the offender has been assigned, to establish Louisiana Department of Education (DOE) monitored education programs in juvenile detention facilities, to establish safe return and re-entry policies, and to increase the age of a juvenile from 17 to 18. UWSELA will monitor the Louisiana Youth Justice Coalition's

initiatives, and based on available financing and law enforcement support for their proposals, determine which of those will be part of UWSELA's legislative agenda.

SMART ON CRIME LOUISIANA

The Pelican Institute for Public Policy's legislative agenda includes legislation to keep non-violent offenders out of prison, emphasize rehabilitation over jail time, and reduce penalties for drug and property crimes. Louisiana has the nation's highest rate of incarceration. UWSELA will monitor Smart on Crime's initiatives, and based on their final proposals, determine which of those will be part of UWSELA's legislative agenda:

- Smart on Crime 2016: Putting Louisiana Back to Work
- Putting Reentering Citizens Back to Work
- Fair Chance Employment
- A Chance at a Fresh Start