

UNITED WAY OF PENNSYLVANIA

# LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR ALICE®

## Lifting Up ALICE® Through Policy Solutions

United Way recognizes the challenges facing many individuals and families throughout Pennsylvania who are going to work every day and still struggling to provide the most basic necessities for themselves and their families. ALICE, which stands for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed, are our neighbors, our friends, and the people who allow for Pennsylvanian's economy to grow. In Pennsylvania, 1.35 million households, or 27 percent, are earning above the federal poverty level but less than is needed for household essentials. Another 12 percent live below the federal poverty level, for a total of 1.97 million households falling below the ALICE survival threshold. The ALICE Survival threshold is the bare minimum an individual or family must earn to make ends meet in a specific county, based off the ALICE Survival Budget. The ALICE survival budget has categories based on housing costs, food costs, transportation costs, and other universal expenses. For a full description or to see the ALICE survival budget for your county, please go to [www.uwp.org/alice](http://www.uwp.org/alice).

United Ways are in a unique position to develop meaningful and lasting cross-sector solutions to the challenges facing ALICE in our communities. Through the generosity of donors, United Ways are able to reduce the burdens ALICE encounters on a daily basis and collaborate through various partnerships to help ALICE move along their journey of financial stability.

United Way of Pennsylvania is a nonprofit and nonpartisan membership organization representing 44 member United Ways across the commonwealth. UWP supports the following public policy priorities to fight for the health, education and financial stability of ALICE in our Commonwealth.

### PA 211: Connecting ALICE with Resources

PA 211 is a one-stop connection for any Pennsylvanian to receive information and referral information for a multitude of health and human services needs. PA 211 is the place many turn to for help when they have never had to ask before and don't know where to turn. Each day, PA 211 is providing ALICE with resources to help alleviate barriers they are facing, such as food insecurity and high utility bills. In 2020, PA 211 helped over 260,000 Pennsylvanians connect to services. Further, PA 211 possesses the most comprehensive database statewide, containing over 33,000 available services. 211 is also the most efficient way for ALICE to find help with any needs among the day-to-day balancing of job, family and financial obligations. It is also available 24/7/365 through phone, plus text and web chat options, allowing ALICE to better connect with the services they need when it is convenient for their schedule.



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## UWP Supports:

- Investment of state funds to continue a public-private partnership, strengthen PA 211 and assure a consistent experience for every user in the state.
- Explore ways to increase the efficiency of state and local governments by contracting to provide services currently offered through government-operated information phone hotlines.
- Leveraging PA 211's community data to help our state address social determinants of health and build resource coordination platforms.
- Providing data for health and human service planning at the state and local level.
- Working closely with state agencies including the Departments of Aging, Health, Human Services, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency to define shared goals to save taxpayer dollars by connecting Pennsylvanians in need to the right services at the right time.

## A Workforce Development Strategy That Works for ALICE

The United Way network is committed to working within our communities to increase family-sustaining employment, assure access to income supports and emergency services for those who need it, and to help families grow savings and assets. Our communities and Commonwealth will be stronger when every individual and family, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, is financially stable and has opportunities for economic mobility. Our workforce development strategies do not adequately account for the challenges faced by a significant portion of our workers who face challenges with reliable transportation and affordable child care.

The ALICE Report highlights that of the 10 million jobs in Pennsylvania, 58 percent pay less than \$20 per hour, and more than one-half of those jobs pay between \$10 and \$15 per hour. Over the past decade, low wage jobs in Pennsylvania have increased by a substantial 75%. Comparing those numbers to the true cost of maintaining a survival household budget, we see costs are outpacing wages. This trend will continue if we do not find solutions to address the needs of our workforce.

United Ways in Pennsylvania invest in a variety of programs that help workers secure and maintain employment. This goes beyond traditional employment training, for example, by reducing barriers to employment such as child care and transportation. United Ways also invest in free tax preparation programs which help make sure working families receive all the tax credits they qualify for. Additional supports such as state and federal Earned Income Tax Credits allow working families to keep more of what they earn to help pay for necessities or unexpected emergencies. United Ways also support programs which focus on financial literacy and family budgeting to help ALICE and others stretch what they earn.



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United Ways across the Commonwealth are committed to working across sectors to define and implement workforce development strategies that offer all workers a path to employment with family-sustaining wages, including partnerships to address the barriers many households are facing.

## **UWP Supports:**

- State and federal Earned Income Tax Credits that support working families and help lift ALICE toward financial stability.
- Job training and career development policies which align to address impending work force shortages.
- Workforce development initiatives that help more of PA's ALICE population achieve jobs that provide family-sustaining wages and lift them to a level of financial sustainability.
- Partnerships with the private, nonprofit, and public sector to find solutions to the barriers facing employees, such as child care and transportation.
- Innovative approaches to connect PA's youth to career readiness opportunities.

## **Accessible and Affordable Child Care, Pre-k and Head Start: Supporting Children's Brain Development and Allowing ALICE to Work**

Child care is expensive, but it is an especially large burden for ALICE. It is about 25-percent of the ALICE survival budget for families with children, and it significantly impacts their ability to be financially stable. Child care represents a Pennsylvania family's greatest expense, averaging \$1,200 per month for two children in licensed home-based care or nearly \$1,600 per month in a high-quality child care center. With 32-percent of families with children in Pennsylvania earning an income below the ALICE survival threshold, in many cases all available adults from ALICE households are in the workforce and child care is an essential component of their budget. Since more than 68-percent of all Pennsylvania families have all available parents in the workforce, the need for accessible and affordable child care is important to ALICE and non-ALICE households.

United Ways have long supported early learning, and do extensive work in ensuring Pennsylvania's children are school-ready by kindergarten. Educational attainment is a predictor of household income, and as research shows us, early learning begins at birth, with some of the most critical years of a child's brain development falling between birth and three years of age. This is why it is imperative every child in Pennsylvania has access to affordable, high-quality child care. It supports child development for households where both parents must work, assures that those parents can be reliable, productive employees, and provides a strategy to help move multiple generations of ALICE families on a path to financial stability.

Research demonstrates high-quality child care, Pre-k and Head Start all improve a child's



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cognitive, language, social and emotional development and school achievement. Children from families with few resources and under great stress benefit most from quality early childhood settings. In a recent poll by Magellan Strategies, over half of Pennsylvania residents support funding high-quality child care.<sup>1</sup>

Footnote:

<sup>1</sup>Magellan Strategies, Pennsylvania Child Care Study

## UWP Supports:

- Assuring all children have access to reliable, high quality and affordable child care, Pre-k and Head Start. United Way of Pennsylvania supports increased funding for Child Care Services to serve children on the child care subsidy waitlist, as well as increased investment so all at-risk kids have access to high quality Pre-k and Head Start.
- Investments from the Commonwealth to improve infant/toddler child care subsidy tiered reimbursement rates for STAR 3 and 4 providers to compensate programs which have met high-quality standards closer to the full cost of high-quality child care to provide more families opportunities to find high-quality care.
- Ensuring workforce development initiatives include opportunities for child care workers, both in Pre-k and high-quality child care settings, to further their training and career.
- Increased state and federal funding for the child care development block grant to support the healthy development and school readiness needs of children, including a focus on increasing quality.

## Prenatal to Age Three Health, Nutrition, and Community Engagement for Pennsylvania Families and Children

Today's babies are tomorrow's future and United Way's network goals include increasing the success of child development through prenatal and child health care, nutrition, and community assistance. United Way of Pennsylvania commits to advocating for policies and funding that encourage and assist the wellbeing of families and children. Parents are often a child's first teachers and ensuring access to evidence-based tools and information for our families is our priority.

Children's development is ongoing and requires an array of services to meet their physical and behavioral health care need. Health insurance helps provide access to preventative and primary health care services and can offer peace of mind and financial security for families.

## UWP Supports:

- Assuring all children have access to health care by building on the success of



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Medicaid and CHIP. United Way supports increased funding for Medicaid and CHIP and targeted investments for at risk families.

- Promoting efforts to identify, improve, and maximize good health for children and families through nutritional opportunities, the decreasing of lead exposure in children, and the maternal health access for expecting and new parents.
- Supporting the expansion of evidence-based home visiting financing and strategies. Home visiting programs are shown to promote child development and school readiness; improve maternal and child health; reduce child abuse and neglect; and support family economic self-sufficiency.

## Supporting Pennsylvania Families as Our Communities Recover from the COVID-19 Pandemic's Impacts

United Way of Pennsylvania advocates for funding levels that support our work to fight for the health, financial stability and education of every person in each community in our state. The COVID-19 Pandemic was an opportunity for nonprofits to pride themselves on their ingenuity and their commitment to serve the public. Now, more than ever, the investment in health and human service programs, which demonstrate positive outcomes and provide basic safety net services for Pennsylvanians, is needed. United Way of Pennsylvania is looking forward while ensuring our communities do not get left behind. It is essential that health and human services receive the necessary investments so that we may stand united with our communities and keep Pennsylvania moving forward.

### UWP Supports:

- Assuring all children have access to health care by building on the success of Medicaid and CHIP. United Way supports increased funding for Medicaid and CHIP and targeted investments for at risk families.
- Promoting efforts to identify, improve, and maximize good health for children and families through nutritional opportunities, the decreasing of lead exposure in children, and the maternal health access for expecting and new parents.
- Supporting the expansion of evidence-based home visiting financing and strategies. Home visiting programs are shown to promote child development and school readiness; improve maternal and child health; reduce child abuse and neglect; and support family economic self-sufficiency.

### For more information about any of these priorities, contact:

Kristen Rotz, President:

[krotz@uwp.org](mailto:krotz@uwp.org) or call 717-238-7365 x 201

Phil Falvo, Director, Public Policy:

[phil@uwp.org](mailto:phil@uwp.org) or call 717-238-7365 x 203

Rebecca O'Shea, Advocacy Coordinator:

[roshea@uwp.org](mailto:roshea@uwp.org) or call 717-238-7365 x 204



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