

UNITED WAY OF PIERCE COUNTY ADVOCACY AGENDA 2022



www.uwpc.org/advocate or email kelvinc@uwpc.org

Our overarching goal at United Way of Pierce County is to lift 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028. As the most recent ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed) demonstrated, 43 percent of Washington households were already struggling to pay bills before the COVID crisis. This work takes the combined efforts of the staff, volunteers, donors, and our network of community partners from throughout Pierce County and beyond. Another vital component of this effort is **advocacy**. Local, state, and federal programs and policies support the work of lifting families and individuals out of poverty.

In this second year of this legislative biennial, our focus is on “unfinished business” or rather those issues that were not fully addressed in the 2021 legislative session. Our advocacy agenda represents the current positions of United Way of Pierce County and many of our community partners. The results of our advocacy efforts along with many other partners and community members are shown below.

TIER 1 PRIORITIES – Actively engage with state legislators

BASIC NEEDS & SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Affordable Housing– Increase Access to Affordable Housing and Invest in Solutions to the Homeless

Public Health Crisis – Provide local governments with options to grant rent relief and preserve affordable housing in their communities and create a grant program for converting unused public buildings to housing for homeless persons.

– Housing is the most expensive and important monthly household expense. Yet affordable housing was already in short supply before the virus hit. People and communities continue to suffer the ravages of homelessness.

- Secure and increase funding for programs that prevent and end the crisis of homelessness.
- Provide policy and resource incentives to boost the creation of more affordable housing by public, private and nonprofit sectors.
- Ensure adequate permanent supported housing including resources such as behavioral health services for people impacted by chronic homelessness.
- Invest [Capital Budget] in the Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve permanent affordable housing across the state.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) -TANF Policy Restoration – Expand the exemptions to the TANF time limits that disproportionately hurt Black, Brown, Indigenous and families of color and ease punitive measures put in place during the Great Recession.

Washington State protects families with children from the harmful effects of deep poverty with TANF/WorkFirst. TANF provides cash assistance and child care to families while parents participate in WorkFirst, which helps with job searching, training, and addressing barriers to employment. The support from TANF has only grown more important as the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our state’s economy and pushed more people into poverty. While the COVID-19 economic crisis has allowed more people to access TANF, this support remains tenuous as long as harsh cuts and policy changes made during the Great Recession remain in place. While the state has made progress in easing some harsh policies, we support a full reversal of recession-era changes that keep families from accessing TANF assistance. These

include enacting commonsense time limit extensions and easing harsh sanction policies, including full-family sanctions that entirely eliminates a family's grant when they are in sanction status.

Washington 2-1-1 [Operating Budget] – The WA211 network has demonstrated its importance a part the state's emergency response in ensuring efficient use of our social services infrastructure. This vital resource needs and deserves continuing support from the state.

Session Results

- **House Bill 1866** - Apple Health and Homes - Rapidly acquire hotel/motel and apartment properties - leverage federal funds **PASSED**
- **House Bill 1724** - Ensuring oversight and coordination of permanent supportive housing resources to maximize the creation of high quality housing opportunities for people living with disabling conditions in communities across Washington **FAILED**
- **House Bill 2017** - Addressing housing concerns for individuals impacted by the criminal legal system **FAILED**

STRONG FAMILIES

Increase Access, Affordability, and Quality of Child Care and Early Learning for Working Families – Affordable and accessible child care helps families by allowing parents to build a career and contribute to our economy, as well as help businesses reduce turnover.

- Children with access to early education programs read earlier, graduate high school at higher rates and have more professional opportunities.
- Before the COVID crisis, most middle- and lower-income families struggled to find and pay for quality child care and pre-K education. Working parents and their employers depend on this care, and their kids require it to be successful in school and life.

The COVID crisis has seriously impacted the feasibility of childcare businesses at a time when childcare is a critical strategy for reopening the economy.

Unrestricted Cash Assistance through a Guaranteed Income – Explore/study a guaranteed income (GI)/cash grants to low-income individual or household. GI programs are shown to keep percentages of populations above the poverty line, decrease racial and gender income gaps, move individuals from part-time to full-time work, reduce anxiety and depression, improve health and education, and increase outlooks on life and personal self-worth. The funds are shown to be spent primarily on basic needs such as food, unexpected expenses, and debt payoffs.

- One major consideration in the implementation of these programs is the impact a newfound income can have on eligibility for public benefits (i.e. SNAP and Medicaid).

Session Results

- **House Bill 1755** - Concerning temporary assistance for needy families' time limit extensions during times of high unemployment. **PASSED**
- **House Bill 1878** - Expand Free School Meals for Washington Kids **PASSED**

- **House Bill 1888** - Allowing the department of revenue to adjust the rates of remittance reductions in the working families' tax credit in order to align with federal maximum qualifying income levels. **PASSED**
- **House Bill 2048** - Concerning temporary assistance for needy families' time limit extensions **FAILED** (Note: Budget Proviso passed to extend time limits for an additional year)
- **Senate Bill 5785** - Extend Transitional Food Assistance to families leaving TANF **PASSED**
- **Senate Bill 5838** - Diaper Subsidy Program **PASSED**
- **House Bill 2009** – Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot **FAILED**

TIER 2 PRIORITIES – Support other organizational expertise

Universal Broadband Access – Support and fund wider access to broadband and digital technology for low-income and underserved communities. Help ensure every household has access to affordable high-speed internet service.

Session Results

- **House Bill 1723** - Closing the digital equity divide by increasing the accessibility and affordability of telecommunications services, devices, and training. **PASSED**

Other Bills of Interest

- **Senate Bill 5793** - Lived Experience Stipend **PASSED**
- **Senate Bill 5729** - Creating a good cause exception to administrative hearing failed lines for applicants or recipients of certain public assistance benefit **PASSED**