

UNITED WAY OF PIERCE COUNTY ADVOCACY AGENDA 2023



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United Way of Pierce County's bold goal is to lift 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028.

Strategic Success Factor: *In partnership with key stakeholders, advance systems changes that address equity by educating communities about social issues and providing a format to shape policy on issues and approaches that dismantle and reduce poverty.*

Our advocacy agenda was built through engagement with community members, especially individuals with lived experiences in each area of focus. Advocacy is one way that we fulfill our [Vision for Equity](#).

As the most recent ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed) report demonstrated, 1 out of 3 of all households in Pierce County are not currently earning wages to maintain a survival budget. In all of Washington State, 50% of households that self-identify as Black are also ALICE. Reducing disparities in wealth and changing systems through which people and households are kept in poverty are key opportunities for action. As we do so, we must also focus on the strengths and assets ingrained in our communities, committing resources to celebrating culture and growing resilience.

We will raise awareness of issues to advance systems change with solutions that positively impact families, specifically those disproportionately impacted, and provide engagement opportunities that build public resolve around equity in Pierce County.

TIER I PRIORITIES – Areas and Issues we intend to actively engage with state legislators

BASIC NEEDS & SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Housing and Shelter: Increase Access to Affordable Housing and Invest in Solutions to End Homelessness

Housing is a basic human right and strongly linked to anti-poverty efforts. Current issues range from families seeking to resolve crisis through shelter and rapid rehousing systems and, for ALICE, opportunities to increase affordable housing to live in and build generational wealth. Pierce County estimates that 4,300 people are experiencing homelessness. Our combined infrastructure when at full capacity can only account for 30% of that need. As a result, approximately 2,970 people are without shelter each night in our region. Additionally, housing prices recently saw rapid increases, which locked many out of first-time homeownership.

- Provide policy and resource incentives to boost the creation of more affordable housing by public, private and nonprofit sectors
- Ensure adequate permanent supported housing
- Support for rental assistance funding to limit evictions
- Continue coordinated entry for Pierce County shelter systems
- Decrease homeownership disparities
- Incentivize alternative housing options to address youth homelessness

South Sound 211 and Washington 211: Increase System Funding

United Way of Pierce County's South Sound 211 continues to lead innovation in navigation within the Washington 211 network, consisting of 7 independent centers across the state. Since the inception of the three-digit dialing service in 2006, 211 has helped over 5 million callers in the state of Washington by providing "No Wrong Door" access to needed services with professional live assistance. Although community requests for service have been heightened since the start of the pandemic, 211 funding has remained static over the years. Increased funding at the statewide level will enable the system to:

- Maintain and improve referral quality and call times
- Strengthen community partnerships, such as coordinated entry for homelessness, transportation services, and family resource navigators
- Provide key supports for Community Information Exchange systems linked to the Social Determinants of Health
- Increase outreach to communities in our South Sound 211 coverage region of Pierce, Thurston, and Lewis counties

Food Equity: Eliminate Hunger and Increase Access to Nutrition Resources across Pierce County

Our Hunger Free Pierce County collaborative identifies and fills in gaps that will make coordinated public and private systems providing food to residents more effective. It also provides a platform for us to partner with households experiencing hunger and food insecurity. We firmly believe that no one should experience hunger today. Currently, food bank service requests and in-person visits are at an all-time high. Proposals in the legislature expected in 2023 include:

- **Universal Free Meals**
 - Support the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction initiative to provide free meals to all students regardless of ability to pay
 - Eliminate the stigma of student receiving free and reduced lunches, feed more students, and reduce administrative burdens on schools
- **Hunger Free College Campuses**
 - Support legislation to create Hunger-Free Campus model for Washington state with:
 - Create comprehensive student-centered food systems, focusing on increasing access to SNAP and SNAP related services to provide flexibility and address different campus needs

STRONG FAMILIES

Economic Self-Sufficiency: Invest in Policies to Advance Economic Justice and Equity

The ALICE Household Survival Budget is the bare minimum cost of household basics necessary to live and work in the modern economy. To create conditions that provide a way for families to lift out of poverty, we will work to decrease the wealth gap, sustain opportunities to earn, keep, and save wages, and create more opportunities for people to become financially secure.

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**
 - Support improvements to TANF:
 - Increasing the dollar amount of the child support pass through
 - Increasing asset limits for families applying for TANF
 - Developing an “off-ramp” for families transitioning off TANF
- **Guaranteed Basic Income**
 - Continue narrative change efforts around the Growing Resilience in Tacoma (GRIT) Demonstration
 - Support the Evergreen Basic Income Pilot bill
- **Benefits Protections**
 - Decrease the cliff effect, where minimal increases in household income cause larger losses in public assistance
- **Promote Federal Tax Credits and Tax Assistance**
 - Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
 - Expanded Child Tax Credit
 - Volunteer Tax Assistance (VITA) initiatives
- **Increase Access, Affordability, and Quality of Child Care and Early Learning for Working Families**
 - Provide state matching funds to enroll 300,000 children ages birth to five in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (UWPNW)
 - The Legislature should continue to ensure that the Fair Start Act and new state and federal investments are implemented in the best ways possible for families and providers
 - Support increases in early learning wages and strengthen language access to retain and recruit highly skilled and multilingual educators
 - Increase investments to childcare mental health consultation and complex needs grants

2023 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA RESULTS

In the Area of Basic Needs and Support Services: Housing and Shelter

- **HB 1046 and HB 1110 passed and were signed into law.** These bills both relate to expanding the supply of housing, by allowing public authorities to finance housing projects and expanding “middle-housing” in areas previously designated as single-family housing.

Additionally, concerning Youth Homelessness Services

- **SB Bill 5256 passed and was signed into law,** expanding the child welfare housing assistance program.

In the Area of Basic Needs & Support Services: Food Equity

- **HB Bill 1238 is now law**, which allows schools with more than 40% of students on free and reduced lunch plans to offer meals to all students between grades K-4 at no charge.
- **HB 1559 passed and has been signed**, this is an initiative around Hunger Free Colleges, and it puts benefits navigators in community and technical colleges. It also starts a pilot to provide free and reduced meals to eligible low-income students in those settings to reduce barriers to participation in college and career training.

Next, in the Area of Strong Families:

- **HB Bill 1447 has passed and been signed into law**, which allows for up to 3 years for families to apply for the Working Families Tax credit, and similar administrative reforms to help families access the tax credit.

In the Area of Strong Families: Benefits Protections and Decreasing the Cliff Effect:

- **HB 1260 moved through and become law**, which helps Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) program recipients in the state avoid technicalities where they would have to repay benefits. It also expands the program in different ways for those living with different types of disabilities.

In addition:

- Although the statewide basic income movement did not move forward, the legislature elected to fund United Way of Pierce County to continue GRIT in our community for the next two years, awarding us a total of \$1.9 million!
- The state will also fund Washington 211 at the \$3 million level.
- The state allocated funded to implement the Dolly Parton Imagination Library statewide at the \$2 Million Dollar level.