



2016 Public Policy Platform

Invest in policies and strategies that help Kansans prepare for, enter and remain in the workforce.

PRIORITY POSITIONS

Adopt Fair Chance Hiring Policy: Nearly one in four working age Kansans has a criminal history which can create barriers to entering the labor market after incarceration. A Fair Chance Hiring policy would allow people who were formerly involved with the criminal justice system to apply for jobs without disclosing previous criminal history until later in the hiring process. It can include exceptions for positions related to law enforcement. Eighteen states, more than 100 local jurisdictions and some of the nation's top employers, including Koch Industries and Walmart, have removed the conviction history check box from job applications, ensuring that qualified candidates are not denied the job opportunity solely based on past action. Offering a fair chance to people with criminal records can reduce recidivism, while simultaneously stimulating the economy by creating work opportunities for those formerly involved in the criminal justice system, enable them to support the well-being of their families.

Advance tax, wage and employment policies that help low-income workers: The strategic use of tax credits, refunds and rebates can help low wage earners stay employed. One of the proven poverty prevention strategies currently in effect in Kansas, the refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit, boosts earnings to help meet basic needs. In addition, an incremental increase in the federal minimum wage would correspondingly increase the Kansas minimum wage, thereby improving the ability of low-wage earners to move toward self-sufficiency. Employee benefits, stable and predictable work hours, and opportunities for advancement should also be considered as ways to help low-wage workers move toward self-sufficiency.

Reduce food sales tax: Kansas is one of only 14 states that include food for at home preparation in the state sales tax base and one of only seven that taxes them at the full retail sales tax rate. The purchase of groceries consumes a higher portion of low-income households' disposable income, resulting in lower-income households paying a larger portion of their income in taxes than higher income households.

Increase access to health care by expanding KanCare: Health impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance is critical for ensuring good health. Expanding KanCare will create an avenue for thousands of low-income, working people in Kansas to obtain health care coverage. Access to timely, less costly preventative care keeps people at work and out of the emergency rooms of their local hospitals. Expansion will benefit hospitals by reducing the cost of uncompensated care.

Provide continued funding for RSI: Rainbow Services, Inc. (RSI), a crisis stabilization center, provides services for persons experiencing mental health or substance abuse crises in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties. RSI's ability to triage individuals improves emergency mental health care and reduces demand for state hospital beds and visits to the emergency room, and keeps people out of local jails. During their first 12 months in operation RSI diverted 125 individuals from the state hospital, 766 from local emergency rooms, and 132 from the jails.

Help extremely low-income families with children achieve stable and successful employment: Families seeking public assistance often face serious barriers to employment, such as limited education and job skills, health issues, domestic violence, and responsibility for disabled children. They face additional challenges due to limited availability of childcare, lack of jobs that pay household sustaining wages and inadequate public transportation. Basing program and policy decisions on the analysis of data, including data about evidence-based practices and client outcomes, will yield improved results for people served by state programs and better investment of public dollars.

STANDING POSITIONS

Maintain essential safety net and work supports:

- ◆ Maintain essential human service programs for the state's most vulnerable residents - the poor, the disabled, and the very young and very old.
- ◆ Provide the state agency resources and staffing levels needed in order to deliver timely, effective services to those who qualify.
- ◆ Offer tax credits, such as the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, food sales tax rebate and homestead property tax refund for renters, to help meet basic needs and support low-wage workers.

Enhance the lives of children and their families:

- ◆ Early learning programs give infants, toddlers, and children a positive start in life. Offer universal access to publicly funded preschool. Protect and preserve the Children's Initiatives Fund in order to advance early childhood learning
- ◆ Support the successful graduation from high school of every Kansas resident and opportunities for post-secondary education.

Improve individual and community well-being through physical and mental health strategies:

- ◆ Improve access to health care including preventive care, dental care and mental health care.
- ◆ Improve the criminal justice system's response to people who are mentally ill.
- ◆ Maintain the current distribution formula for alcohol excise tax in order to support community-based alcohol and substance abuse programs.

Provide adequate funding for human service infrastructure:

- ◆ Protect investments in health and human services that support workforce development and self-sufficiency.
- ◆ Maximize use of federal funds to advance state and local programs.
- ◆ Avoid shifting costs to the local community.

ABOUT UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES (UCS)

United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS) provides data analysis, leads collaborative planning and mobilizes resources to enhance the availability and delivery of health and human services. UCS's work is primarily in Johnson County, Kansas. Founded in 1967, UCS is a nonprofit, 501c3 organization. Funding support is from United Way of Greater Kansas City, Johnson County Government, city governments, grants and contributions.

Our Current Work:

- UCS is working in partnership with County Government to reduce poverty and increase opportunity for the county's low-income residents. This effort includes a focus on employment, early learning and safety net support for individuals and families with children.
- UCS leads the Johnson County Continuum of Care on Homelessness to improve the response to homelessness, partners with local government to maximize use of local alcohol tax funds, and regularly convenes community partners to identify effective responses to barriers and gaps in the human service response.

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