



## 2017 PUBLIC POLICY PLATFORM

United Community Services of Johnson County is committed to building a community where all people have the opportunity to achieve their individual potential. We believe in the importance of supporting programs and services that are invested in the success of our community's human resources.

### PRIORITY POSITIONS

#### **Advance fiscal and taxation policies that support citizens' ability to reach and maintain economic stability. Strategic use of tax credits, refunds and rebates can help low wage earners stay employed**

- Protect the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): This credit allows low wage earners to retain earned income to help meet their family's basic needs.
- 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. Reducing or eliminating the food tax helps make nutritional food options more affordable for low-income families.
- Retain tax credits that support low-income families: The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, food sales tax rebate, and homestead property tax refund for renters help meet basic needs and support low-wage workers.

#### **Increase access to health care by expanding KanCare (Medicaid) eligibility**

Health impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance is critical for ensuring good health. Adopting a Kansas-specific expansion of KanCare to maximize coverage to those newly eligible for Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) creates an avenue for thousands of low-income, working people in Kansas to obtain health care coverage while having a positive effect on the state's economy by creating new jobs and protecting healthcare providers. Affordable health care supports healthy families and a productive economy.

#### **Improve Access to the Safety Net**

Recent policy changes in Kansas' HOPE Act have resulted in further limitations on access to Safety Net programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Child Care Assistance Program. A successful safety net includes investment in and ready access to education, health and human services such as job training; work supports; affordable housing; mental health; substance abuse prevention and treatment; and food and nutrition supports. Spending a modest amount now prevents spending exponentially more on health care, incarceration, and government services/supports later.

#### **Advance employment policies that help low-income workers and increases access to employment**

- Increase minimum wage and job benefits: 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.
- Adopt Fair Chance Hiring Policies: 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. 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, enabling them to support the well-being of their families. 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.

## 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 state agency resources and staffing levels needed in order to deliver timely, effective services to those who qualify.

### **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 and workforce training.

### **Provide continued funding for RSI:**

- ◆ RSI, a crisis stabilization center, provides services for persons experiencing mental health or substance abuse crises in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties.

### **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 use 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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