

## 2021 PUBLIC POLICY PLATFORM

United Community Services of Johnson County believes in the importance of supporting policies, programs and services that invest in the health and well-being of our community and provide people the opportunity to achieve their individual potential.

One way UCS supports health equity for all Kansans is through public policy advocacy, recognizing that everyone should have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires intentionally addressing health disparities such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences. Institutional racism is taking a toll on our communities of color. Health equity requires that we remove institutional obstacles to health, like disparities in access to housing, education, employment, and health services.

UCS provides data analysis, leads collaborative planning and mobilizes resources to enhance the availability and delivery of health and human services.

### KANSAS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITIONS

#### **Economic Stability**

*Advance wage, housing, employment, taxation, health, and business retention and growth policies that support citizens' ability to improve economic stability and move toward self-sufficiency.*

#### **Support Job Benefits & Minimum Wage Increase:**

Pathways to economic stability include employee benefits such as paid sick leave, paid family leave, stable and predictable work hours, and minimum wage increases that keep pace with cost of living.

**Protect State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** This credit allows low-wage earners to retain earned income to help meet their family's basic needs.

**Retain Tax Credits for Low-Income Families:** Retain the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and food sales tax rebate. Reinststate the homestead property tax refund for renters.

**Reduce Food Sales Tax:** Kansas is one of only six states that tax food at the full retail sales tax rate. The purchase of groceries consumes a higher percentage of low-income households' limited resources and results in lower-income households paying a larger portion of their income in taxes than higher income households.

#### **Support Recovery Solutions for Employees and Employers:**

Invest in training and supports that equip workers for in demand employment opportunities. Fund economic recovery solutions that retain and grow living wage jobs for Kansans.

**Review Sanctions related to Justice Involvement that are Barriers to Employment and Economic Stability:** Amend ineffective fines and sanctions related to nonviolent offenses that disproportionately impact low income households and act as barriers to obtaining or maintaining employment.

#### **Transportation**

**Invest in Public Transportation:** Increase investment to support local and regional transportation options that serve workforce needs as well as a means for access to education, healthcare and other basic services.

#### **Housing**

**Support Safe, Stable, Affordable Housing:** Support policies that promote attainable and sustainable housing choices. Expand eligibility of the Homestead Act and SAFESR – Kansas Property Tax Relief for Low Income Seniors. Reauthorize the state mortgage interest and property tax deductions. Maintain the low-income housing tax credit. Repeal statutes that act as barriers to attainable housing such as KSA §12-16,120 (Mixed Income Housing) and KSA§12-16,138 (Inspection Restrictions).

#### **Healthcare Access**

**Expand KanCare (Medicaid) Eligibility:** Affordable healthcare supports healthy families and a productive economy. Health impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance is critical for ensuring good health. A Kansas-specific expansion of KanCare to maximize coverage to those newly eligible for Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will create an avenue for thousands of low-income, working people in Kansas to obtain healthcare coverage while creating new jobs and protecting healthcare providers.

**Restore & Increase Mental Health Funding:** Enable community mental health centers (CMHC) to provide timely, adequate mental health care and treatment to all residents regardless of their ability to pay.

#### **Well-Being & Self-Sufficiency**

#### **Increase TANF Support of Core Activities that Help Prepare Recipients for Work:**

In 2018, KS ranked 44th among states for percent of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds spent on core activities. The state spent only 16% of these funds on core welfare reform activities, which include basic assistance (8%), work activities and supports (4%), and child care (4%). Cash assistance covers only about 50% of HUD fair market rent and has not changed in real dollars since 1996 (representing a 40% decrease in 2020 inflation adjusted dollars). For every 100 poor families with children in Kansas, less than 10 received TANF cash assistance.

#### **Support Internet Solutions for Low Income Households:**

Household internet access (Teleco/ISP) is a necessary utility. A pathway to digital access, is needed for low-income households to meet education, telehealth and employment.

**Youth Supports**

**Improve Child Well-Being & Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care:** Allow young adults aged 18–21 the option to seamlessly re-enter the child welfare system, and ensure continuity in medical, behavioral health and support services for youth who have exited the custody of the Kansas Department for Children and Families, including an automatic enrollment process for the Medicaid state plan for young adults under age 26 years.

Although Kansas youth who are in out-of-home placement at the time they reach their 18th birthday can extend access to supportive services until at least 21 years of age, Kansas does not allow re-entry back into care for youth who chose to leave foster care when they turn 18 years old.

**LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITY POSITIONS**

**Safe, Stable, Affordable Housing**

UCS is proud to be working with the cities and County to launch a comprehensive study and task force to address housing options and affordability throughout Johnson County. A review of state statutes and local ordinances that create barriers to creating and maintaining varied price and type of housing choices should be a part of the planning process. Research highlights the growing disparity between the rate of rising rent and housing costs versus wage growth. This issue impacts residents across all ages and stages of their lives, especially people on a fixed income, the disabled, residents experiencing poverty, uninsured residents, people of color, and community members across a number of occupations vital to the economic health and growth of Johnson County.

**Homelessness**

UCS advocates for cities and the County to work together to formulate a sustainable ongoing response for adult residents without minor children experiencing homelessness in Johnson County.

**FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITIONS**

**Support Health Care Accessibility:** Affordable healthcare supports healthy families and a productive economy. Health impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance is critical for ensuring good health.

**Increase Federal Allocations to TANF:** Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funding to states has not changed since its creation in 1996. In every state, benefits are at or below 60% of the federal poverty level and have not kept pace with rising costs of housing.

**Support Fair & Balanced Immigration Policies:**

Access to supports and services that enable immigrant families to become self-sufficient is vital to ensure an able and ready workforce, stable families, and healthy children prepared to learn and thrive.

**Fully Fund the Early Childhood Education Act & the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):**

The years before a child reaches kindergarten are the most critical to influence learning. Many children do not have access to early education before entering kindergarten. Early learning programs such as Early Health Start give infants, toddlers, and children a positive start in life.

**Maintain Current Johnson Amendment Protections:**

UCS opposes proposals that would politicize the charitable nonprofit and philanthropic community by repealing or weakening current federal tax law protections that prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations from endorsing, opposing, or contributing to political candidates.

**STANDING POSITIONS**

- ⇒ Maintain essential work and well-being investments/ supports.
- ⇒ Ensure adequate state agency resources, staffing levels, and technology investments needed to deliver timely, effective services.
- ⇒ Protect and preserve the Children’s Initiatives Fund (CIF).
- ⇒ Expand early learning supports.
- ⇒ Support the successful high school graduation of every Kansas resident and opportunities for post-secondary education and workforce training.
- ⇒ Provide continued state funding for RSI and expanded funding for the further establishment of regional mental health crisis stabilization units.
- ⇒ Enhance access to healthcare 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 the alcohol excise tax in order to support community-based alcohol and substance use programs.
- ⇒ Increase investments in health and human services that support workforce development and self-sufficiency.

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