

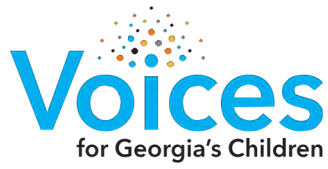


# 2025 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

## IT STARTS WITH CHILDREN.



**Child Measures** The 2025 Public Policy Agenda was created in collaboration between United Way of Greater Atlanta and Voices for Georgia's Children.



# 2025 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

## It Starts with the Children

When our children have a high level of well-being, it is a sign that the entire community is on track to succeed. Unfortunately, however, almost half a million children in Greater Atlanta are growing up in circumstances that can imperil good health, academic and career success, or stability at home.

To determine the factors that communicate child well-being, United Way worked with Neighborhood Nexus, the primary data partner. In this role, they gather and maintain the data from the various sources, including the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Department of Public Health, and the U.S. Census Bureau. This index provides a focal point for state and community leaders, policy makers, and other stakeholders to rally around in order to improve opportunities and outcomes for children and families, thereby changing not only the trajectory of the Georgians at hand, but also that of Georgia itself.

In 2024, the United Ways of Georgia (UWGA), an association composed of the 31 United Way organizations operating in Georgia, collectively invested to become the 29th state organization to participate in United for ALICE movement. This data complements the Child Well-Being Index by providing a clearer picture of the financial struggles faced by many families in the region. ALICE data identifies households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level but still struggle to meet basic needs like housing, food, childcare, healthcare, and technology.



In fact, 2025 brings additional opportunity: United Way of Greater Atlanta is currently working with partner organizations to focus on the needs of child welfare-involved youth and their families in Georgia. Voices for Georgia's Children, Georgia Appleseed, Barton Child Law and Policy Center, Multi-Agency Alliance for Children, Interfaith Children's Movement, and Partnership for Southern Equity are all working collaboratively with United Way of Greater Atlanta to pay special attention to the following issue areas:

- Adequately **fund, train, and support child-serving workforce** to minimize trauma and maximize successful outcomes for children and youth in Georgia's Child Welfare system.

Such participants include:

- o Attorneys, Guardians ad Litem, CASAs, case managers and others representing children, parents, or caregivers
- o Biological parents
- o Foster care providers, kinship care providers, and adoptive parents
- o School personnel including educators, social workers, psychologists, and administrators

- Ensure that **children and parents with behavioral health needs** and/or dual diagnoses have access to the preventive, interventive, and restorative services and supports that they need when they need them.

- Ensure that **youth exiting foster care** have timely and reliable assistance with housing, educational and employment opportunities, health and behavioral health services, parenting education and support, financial education, and transportation. When appropriate, the families and associated caregivers should be afforded such assistance as well.

- Ensure that **youth, caregiver, and other community members** are provided meaningful opportunity to communicate their needs, evaluate the effectiveness of existing services and programs, and participate in the design and implementation of initiatives affecting their lives and communities.





# CHILD WELL-BEING MEASURES

**Overall child well-being reflects the status of children, families, and the broader community. The Child Well-Being Index serves as a comprehensive measurement tool, combining data from three key dimensions to inform and guide regional work and investment strategies.**

## Child Measures

- % Low Weight Births
- % Students Exceeding 3rd Grade Reading Standards
- % Students Exceeding 8th Grade Math Standards
- Student Mobility Score High School Graduation Rate
- % 16 to 19-Year-Old enrolled in school or in the workforce
- % of children without health insurance

## Family Measures

- % Families Not Financially Stable
- Families with Housing Cost Burden
- % Births to Mothers without a High School Diploma

## Community Measures

- % Enrolled in Post-Secondary Education
- % Adults without a High School Diploma
- % Adults without Health Insurance
- Unemployment Rate
- % Access to Broadband Internet
- Food Accessibility Score

The Child Well-Being Index incorporates data from multiple sources (Georgia Department of Education, Public Health Department, U.S. Census). We are especially grateful to Neighborhood Nexus and the Atlanta Regional Commission, the primary partners in the development of the Child Well-Being Index and alignment of community perception data through the Metro Atlanta Speaks public opinion poll.





In 2024, United Ways of Georgia in partnership with United For ALICE, a launched the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) initiative in collaboration with United For ALICE. This initiative aims to provide Georgia-specific data and research to enhance awareness and drive actions promoting financial stability, with United For ALICE and United Ways across Georgia sharing this work with foundations, government, corporations, and other nonprofits to inform policy and promote positive change for ALICE households.

By utilizing ALICE data, the initiative offers a more accurate and comprehensive measure of the scope, causes, and consequences of financial hardship. This enables better identification of problems, planning of policy solutions, and allocation of resources.

### **Understanding ALICE Households**

ALICE households earn above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but struggle to afford basic necessities. These workers often face difficult choices, such as prioritizing childcare over rent, which can have far-reaching consequences for their families and communities. Despite their critical roles in our society—educating children, maintaining health, and ensuring quality of life—many ALICE workers cannot adequately support their families.

### **Financial Hardship in Georgia**

Official measures often undercount the number of households in financial hardship. In 2022, over 1.4 million Georgia households fell into what United Way calls the ALICE population. These are hardworking families earning more than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but still struggling to afford basic living expenses. Combining those households with the 523,000 families living in poverty reflects that 48% of Georgia households live below the ALICE threshold.

### **The Importance of ALICE Data**

The ALICE initiative provides a new way of understanding the struggles of households that earn above the FPL but still face financial challenges. For many families, the cost of living outpaces their earnings. The future success of our communities is directly tied to the financial stability of these fragile ALICE households.







# POLICY PRIORITIES

**The following policy align with United Way of Greater Atlanta's Child Well-Being Agenda to do the most good for children and communities**

## LAY A FOUNDATION OF STRONG LEARNERS

- Expand initiatives that help families with young children, such as
  - Evidence Based Home Visiting, including public and private insurance coverage for Home Visiting service
  - Allow continuous eligibility for Medicaid from birth through 3 years of age
  - Infant-Toddler Mental Health
  - Early intervention programs like Children First
  - Childcare subsidies
- Continue and expand improvements in Early Childhood Education
  - Maintain the number of lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K slots
  - Expand Georgia's lottery-funded Pre-K program to include 3 year olds
  - Explore policy and other opportunities to support and fund high quality infant and toddler care
  - Improve incentives to retain and expand a quality childcare workforce
  - Expand access to high quality afterhours, overnight, and weekend childcare to help caregivers who work non-traditional hours
- Support and expand programs for maternal health:
  - Expand access to dental services and lead testing for women of childbearing age
  - Improved funding for doula services, centering pregnancy programs, community health workers, Planning for Healthy Babies, etc.
  - Expand training and awareness to identify and address postpartum depression
  - Incentivize maternal health providers to practice in rural and high needs areas
- Identify and support pregnant women and other parents in Georgia's Criminal Justice System

## TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO K-12 EDUCATION

- Maintain full QBE funding.
  - Additionally, create and fund an "Opportunity Weight" to ensure additional dollars to help educate students living in poverty.
- Ensure funding to cover the cost of school-related personal digital devices.
- Expand home and school broadband connectivity and fund internet access for families in need.
- Dedicate state funding for Afterschool and Summer Enrichment programs
- Enhance learning acceleration using individual-centered instructional methods.
- Ensure Literacy Coaches for all school systems.
- Expand school-based services and frameworks that improve health and mental health, such as:
  - Georgia's Apex Program
  - Comprehensive school-based health centers
  - The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports framework
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Sources of Strength
  - Free Your Feels campaign
- Improved school social worker-to-student, school social worker, school counselor to student, and school psychologist to student ratios
  - Ensure that when a student changes or newly enters a school that their records and meaningful data follow and that such are reviewed by key personnel at the destination school - all in a timely manner.



# POLICY PRIORITIES



## **PREPARE EVERY STUDENT FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND CAREER**

- Reduce the use of exclusionary school discipline and juvenile court referral in K-12 education.
- Improve the design, understanding, and practical implementation of Georgia's Dual Enrollment and CTAE (Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education) Programs to serve a broader array of students.
- Continue to fund HOPE Grants and HOPE scholarships at the 100% factor rate.
- Expand educational partnerships between the University System of Georgia/Technical College System of Georgia and Georgia's Departments of Juvenile Justice, Corrections, and Community Supervision.
- Authorize and fund a need-based scholarship for post-secondary education and incorporate equity considerations into the requirements.
- Expand existing efforts to help dislocated and incumbent workers transition into high-demand career pathways using resources available through employers, the Technical College System of Georgia, and the Georgia Department of Labor.
- Develop new and expand existing education, health, and legal culturally-informed resources for families, including linguistic competence for particular fields.



# POLICY PRIORITIES

## ENSURE THAT PUBLIC POLICY PROMOTES FAMILY, CHILD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

- Support youth to form and maintain healthy relationships and connections and to act with a sense of self-determination, exercising choice about how they lead their lives.
- Promote empowerment of young people in their own development through meaningful and active participation in policymaking processes.
- Ensure youth in foster care have timely access to services and supports designed to meet their needs, including physical health and mental well-being, safe and affordable housing, and community-based service navigators and/or peer supports; competent, dependable, and knowledgeable case management; safe and appropriate placements; and adequate information on which to base decisions.
- Promote quality legal representation for every child and youth in Georgia experiencing the child welfare system by establishing a state-funded entity to coordinate, initiate, and support quality assurance and improvement for children's lawyers.
- Promote quality legal representation for biological parents in dependency proceedings to improve permanency outcomes whether through safe and stable reunification or otherwise.
- Prioritize and increase the use of evidence-driven programs as alternatives to detention for youth and non-violent adults, including accountability courts (e.g., family treatment, mental health, drug, juvenile drug, etc.), Children in Need of Services (CHINS) programs, supportive housing initiatives, and the like.

## INCENTIVIZE COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING AND ALTERNATIVES TO POLICE INTERVENTION WHEN GEORGIANS EXPERIENCE A MENTAL HEALTH OR HOMELESSNESS CRISIS.

- Expand jurisdiction of juvenile court to encompass all youth under age 18
- Ensure necessary state investments in salaries for child and family-serving agencies with high staff turnover, including Division of Family and Children Services, Department of Juvenile Justice and GA Department of Corrections.
- Adequately fund, train, and support child-serving individuals to minimize trauma and maximize successful outcomes for system-involved children and youth, including attorneys, Guardians ad Litem, CASAs, case managers, biological parents, foster care providers, kinship care providers, and adoptive parents, all school personnel, and health and mental health personnel.
- Ensure that children and parents with behavioral health needs and/or dual diagnoses have access to the preventive, interventive and restorative services and supports that they need when they need them.
- Improve outpatient and/or home-centered supports for adults and children with disabilities and/or behavioral health needs.
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- Fund access points to help Georgians in need, such as United Way 211, 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and App, [findhelpga.org](https://findhelpga.org).







# POLICY PRIORITIES

## HELP EVERY FAMILY ACHIEVE ECONOMIC STABILITY

- Improve consumer protections for renters, loan applicants, and those making use of subsidized housing:
  - Prioritize policies that simultaneously prevent eviction and stabilize landlord-tenant relationships
  - Improve protections against and mitigation policies and interventions for environmental safety hazards, such as lead exposure, water- or airborne carcinogens, and others
  - Incentivize safe and affordable housing to make it available in all neighborhoods
  - Streamline administrative processes for affordable housing qualification and supports
- Ensure that youth exiting foster care have timely and reliable assistance with housing, educational and employment opportunities, health and behavioral health services, parenting education and support, and transportation. When appropriate, the families and associated caregivers should be afforded such assistance as well.
- Enact a state Earned Income Tax Credit that mirrors the federal credit to provide additional financial relief to ALICE households.
- Incentivize family-friendly workplace policies among employers.
- Promote financial education and incentivize emergency savings opportunities for families.
- Enroll, maintain enrollment, and streamline application processes for eligible children and families in all the benefits they're eligible for, especially those pertaining to health, nutrition, and education.
- Fully expand Medicaid to ensure all ALICE households have access to affordable healthcare.
- Invest in job training and education programs to help ALICE workers gain skills for higher-paying jobs.
- Offer grants and low-interest loans to small businesses, particularly those owned by ALICE individuals, to promote economic growth and job creation.

## MAKE EVERY ZIP CODE A PLACE WHERE NEIGHBORHOODS THRIVE

- Establish balanced and equitable tax systems at the state and local levels that allow for investments in public safety nets and education.
- Expand the number of and augment existing Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- Invest in community public health and behavioral healthcare infrastructure to increase equity and meet all Georgians' needs.
- Support the successful rehabilitation, re-entry, and inclusion of court-involved youth and adults into their communities.
- Support, encourage, and enable place-based assistance for families, including legal advocacy, health and mental health supports, and various kinds of learning opportunities.
- Ensure that youth, caregiver, and other community members are provided meaningful opportunity to communicate their needs, evaluate the effectiveness of existing services and programs, and participate in the design and implementation of initiatives affecting their lives and communities.
- Provide maximum access to supplemental nutrition supports to ensure food security for all.



Every United Way around the country is encouraged by United Way Worldwide to engage in public policy and advocacy on non-partisan issues in ways that further each United Way's mission and help the people they serve.



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