UNITED WAY POLICY AGENDA FOR THE 116TH CONGRESS

UNITED WE FIGHT.
UNITED WE WIN.

LIVE UNITED®

United Way fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community.

UnitedWay.org/publicpolicy
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Colleagues,

Amid a challenging political environment, United Way’s advocacy voice has strengthened. In the last two years, we have achieved some significant policy wins because of our collective work in advocacy; securing increased funding for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program and preservation of tax credits for families and children, protecting Medicaid from harmful structural changes, the unprecedented ten-year reauthorization for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the reauthorization and strengthening of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As we look to the next Congress, United Way will continue to advocate for policies that make our communities strong and foster safe environments where everyone can thrive.

While our economy continues to rebound and strengthen, far too many hard-working families still struggle to provide for the basics. Many families lack access to the economic opportunities they need to thrive in a fast-changing world. In response, United Way has set new, bold ten-year goals to improve the health, education and financial stability of the communities we serve. At United Way, we are committed to 5 million people getting better jobs, 95 percent of students graduating high school ready for college and career, and 90 percent of people being healthier.

To support these 2028 goals, United Ways will engage 10 million people to build inclusive, more equitable and stronger communities in 1,000 towns and cities across America.

This policy agenda for the 116th Congress outlines the policies we will fight for to advance these goals. We will fight to ensure children get a strong start in school, youth earn the credentials they need to have a career, people of all ages have access to affordable, adequate healthcare and that everyone can pursue employment opportunities that enable them and their families to secure successful futures.

To succeed in these goals, we must work together to address the disparities that persist in our country, especially among minority populations and rural communities, that prevent people from accessing affordable healthcare, children from a quality education, and workers from concrete economic opportunities that will enable them to thrive and communities to rebuild and prosper.

We have big problems to solve; from the scourge of opioid addiction, to inadequate and inequitable funding across our public schools, to an economy driven by a great number of low-wage jobs. But when United Ways advocate together with one collective voice, we accomplish great things for our communities and our country. In the words of Edward Everett Hale, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

People’s expectations for engagement and community impact are changing and they look to United Way to guide them and bring them together, to build empowered communities and effect positive change. We proudly step forward and are eager for that challenge. We know that tough issues require hard work, and that change doesn’t happen alone. It takes combining community support with digital technology and all of us fighting and pulling together as one. To all our partners, donors, volunteers and advocates — thank you for joining the fight alongside us. With your help and dedication, we will continue to advocate for lasting change that impacts countless lives, makes our country a better place and leaves an enduring mark on our society.

Our public policy agenda for the 116th Congress reflects the efforts of local and state United Ways in collaboration with diverse public, private, and nonprofit partners, to fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community. United we fight, and United we win!

Mary B. Sellers

President, U.S. Network
United Way Worldwide
“Because government is a critical decision-maker and the major provider and funder of health and human services, United Way must actively engage in public policy.”

- United Way Worldwide Standards of Excellence 1.4

Across the United States, local United Ways assess the needs of their communities and work to address them through strategic investments, local and regional partnerships, and direct services. This work enables United Ways to gather accurate, detailed and reliable information that is vital for policymakers at all levels of government faced with making tough decisions.

As the largest non-governmental funder of health and human services in local communities throughout the United States, United Way stewards billions of dollars and millions of volunteer-hours each year. While our impact locally and collectively as a network is vast, United Way recognizes that government spending in our focus areas of health, education and financial stability far exceeds the capability of the nonprofit sector.

United Way engages in public policy advocacy to leverage the knowledge and experience of our network to help inform policymakers’ decisions regarding governance and funding of critical health and human services.

As a leader in the nonprofit community, United Way seeks to craft practical long-term solutions for people and communities. Through a nonpartisan, non-ideological approach to advocacy, we leverage our convening power to bring together untraditional allies – businesses, labor, nonprofits, government and advocates – to fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community.

For additional information on United Way’s policy engagement, visit www.unitedway.org/publicpolicy
Developed in consultation with United Way leaders across the U.S. network, national thought leaders and issue experts, United Way’s policy agenda reflects our work and strategic direction in the areas of health, education and financial stability. While there are many important public policy issues worth supporting, the issues identified are the most critical to our mission, politically viable, and ones where United Way can most positively impact the national dialogue.

**United Way will employ a combination of the following engagement strategies to advance these policy issues:**

- Assume a leadership role in advocacy, representing the network before Congress, the Administration, and the human services sector – proactively advocating for, and bringing visibility to, these priority issues.

- Proactively engage local and state United Ways across the United States to advocate with their Members of Congress, provide consultation, training, messaging and technical assistance.

- Collaborate with or lead advocacy partnerships and national coalitions of nonprofits and advocacy organizations on United Way’s policy priorities.
HEALTH
IMPROVING PEOPLE’S HEALTH
To achieve United Way’s impact goals for the next decade, we will fight for health policies that will help 90 percent of Americans attain improved physical and mental health.

It is critical that all Americans, at every stage of life, have adequate healthcare coverage that is accessible and affordable. Good health and consistent access to quality healthcare are essential for children to succeed academically and for adults to maintain self-sufficiency. Furthermore, veterans have unique physical and mental health needs that must be addressed in our efforts to improve access to healthcare for all.

It is also critical we address the disparities that still exist in accessing healthcare. Access to care must not be blocked by cultural, linguistic, financial or logistical barriers. Data shows that while some disparities have decreased over the last decade as more individuals gained access to care because of changes in federal health policies, poor or low-income individuals, black and Hispanic Americans still have less access to quality healthcare services than do white Americans and individuals with higher incomes.¹

To build toward United Way’s 10-year goal to ensure 90 percent of Americans are healthier, United Way will focus its advocacy efforts on the following health policies.

Improve and expand access to healthcare coverage for children and adults.

Since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, 25 million more Americans have become insured and the rate of uninsured people has dropped to the lowest on record. We also saw the reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program for an unprecedented ten years, providing health coverage for 9 million children. Medicaid, the nation’s health insurance program for low to moderate-income Americans, provides coverage for over 97 million children, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities. The expansion of Medicaid has increased coverage for low and moderate-income families in 34 states and the District of Columbia and several other states are attempting to expand Medicaid through ballot initiative or legislative action. Other, longer established programs, like Community Health Centers, provide critical access to healthcare services for rural communities and low-income people of color.
While some progress has been made, there are signs momentum may be heading in the wrong direction. There has been a slight increase in the rate of uninsured Americans, with 12.2 percent of people remaining without insurance\textsuperscript{ii}. The uninsured rate remains disproportionately high among low-income households and minority populations. In 2016, non-Hispanic whites had the lowest uninsured rate at 6.3 percent. The uninsured rates for blacks and Asians were higher at 10.5 percent and 7.6 percent, respectively. Hispanics had the highest uninsured rate, at 16.0 percent.\textsuperscript{iii} These trends are further concerning given the movement in some states to restrict access to Medicaid from those who need it most. Significant work remains to protect and expand Medicaid coverage for Americans to access the healthcare they need.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Accessible and affordable healthcare coverage for all Americans regardless of race, income, age, gender or ethnicity.
- Consumer protections and essential health benefits that ensure healthcare is adequate.
- A robust Medicaid program that preserves access for children, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans and low-income households.
- Increased funding for Community Health Centers to support access to healthcare services for low-income and rural communities.
- Awareness and protection of the Children’s Health Insurance Program.

**Increase resources for behavioral health services for children and adults.**

As part of United Way’s comprehensive approach to healthcare, access to mental health resources are essential for the physical, mental and emotional development of children, for youth to succeed academically and for adults to lead productive lives.

More than 40 million adults in the United States, and one in five children, suffer from a mental health disorder. Addressing adverse childhood experiences and childhood and adult trauma are becoming increasingly central to the work of mental health professionals to promote healthier outcomes for at risk children and adults. Over the last decade we have witnessed a dramatic increase of more than 30 percent in the national suicide rate. The suicide rate among teens, especially black youth, has soared by 70 percent\textsuperscript{iv} and over 20 veterans commit suicide every day\textsuperscript{v}. A substantial proportion of veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq have significant symptoms of psychological disorders, impairment, and disability, with almost one third suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, major depression, traumatic brain injury, or a combination.\textsuperscript{vi}
The opioid epidemic continues to devastate families and communities, as more than 115 people in the U.S. die from fatal opioid related overdoses—everyday. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that the total “economic burden” of prescription opioid misuse in the United States is $78.5 billion a year, when accounting for healthcare costs, lost productivity, addiction treatment services, and costs to the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the opioid epidemic is taking an incredibly destructive toll on our nation’s children with an increase in babies born with addiction and birth defects, children losing parents to overdose, and toxic stress associated with these traumatic experiences that has lifelong consequences. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and CDC’s Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) provide critical resources for local communities to address the behavioral health needs of youth, adults and communities. The PPHF also supports programs that address gaps in racial health disparities. Increased dedicated federal resources are needed for states and local communities to fully respond to the opioid epidemic.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Robust funding for SAMSHA programs enabling youth to succeed in school and adults to lead productive lives.
- Full funding and outreach of Veterans Administration suicide prevention programs.
- Increased federal resources for states and local communities dedicated to addressing the opioid epidemic.
- Full funding of the CDC Prevention and Public Health Fund.
- Trauma informed care legislation that supports the mental health needs of children and adults.
EDUCATION
HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL
"Over the next 10 years, United Way is working to ensure that 95 percent of students graduate high school ready for college and a career and 5 million people get better jobs."

To ensure strong communities, it is imperative that all our nation’s students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education or the workforce. This preparation starts early, with access to affordable, high-quality child-care and early learning opportunities so that children enter school ready to learn. Elementary and secondary school students must have access to a challenging, well-rounded curriculum and wraparound supports, such as afterschool and summer learning programs. And because a high school diploma is not sufficient in today’s knowledge economy, every young adult should have the opportunity to pursue a quality degree or credential, even as higher education costs continue to rise and despite the barriers to entry and completion that exist for low-income students. High school graduates have higher earning potential and contribute more to their local economies, and those who obtain a post-secondary credential increase their earning potential and employment prospects even further.

That’s why, over the next 10 years, United Way is working to ensure that 95 percent of students graduate high school ready for college and career and 5 million people get better jobs. For many years United Ways have played a role in community-wide efforts to reduce opportunity gaps and improve educational outcomes, especially for low-income, historically disadvantaged children and youth. These and other efforts remain critical to address persistent opportunity, achievement and attainment gaps in education.

While the recent rise in the national high school graduation rate to 84 percent is encouraging and should be celebrated, our nation still struggles to achieve educational equity between black, Latino and low-income students and their white and Asian peers. Graduation rates for black and Latino students are 76 and 79 percent respectively; and low-income students graduate at a rate about 12 percent lower than their peers. And while the number of low-performing high schools has declined overall, black and Latino students are more likely than white and Asian students to attend schools that graduate less than two-thirds of their senior class in a given year. In addition, more work must be done to ensure that a high school diploma is meaningful. Recent studies have shown that fewer than 8 percent of all U.S. students graduate with a degree that sufficiently prepares them for college and career.

In the last 50 years, our country has made only modest gains towards closing the attainment gap in higher education. In 2016, 71 percent of white and Hispanic students enrolled in college as compared to only 56 percent of black students. The gap deepens in terms of the numbers of students that attain a degree – in 2015 33 percent of white students obtained a college degree, in contrast to 23 percent of black students, and 16 percent of Hispanic student.

The United Way network is working to improve educational opportunities for all students along the continuum of education, from cradle to career. To advance our 10-year goals of ensuring 95 percent of students graduate from high school college and career ready and 5 million people get better jobs, United Way will focus its advocacy efforts on the following education policies.
Increase access to high quality early care and education opportunities, especially for low-income children and their families.

Research shows the preschool years are critical for cognitive and social development, laying a foundation for success in college, work and life. In fact, 85 - 90 percent of a child’s brain is developed by age five. Despite the overwhelming evidence that quality early learning experiences have a positive, lasting impact on growth, development and later success in life, disparities in access remain: 57 percent of children from low-income families are enrolled in Pre-K, in contrast to 77 percent of children from middle class or affluent families; 30 percent of children living in urban and suburban communities have access to Pre-K programs, compared to 15 percent of children in rural communities. There is still considerable work to be done to expand access to affordable and high quality early care and education.

The Child Care Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) grants funding to states to provide access to child care services for low-income families and improve the quality of child care. These programs are broadly used nationwide with 65 percent of all children already accessing services such as kindergarten or nursery school programs. Even with an increase in the enrollment for these programs, gaps persist. In 2015, 51 percent of Hispanic children and 45 percent of black children were not enrolled in pre-primary programs. CCDBG was reauthorized in 2014 to update and improve health and safety, quality and eligibility provisions, but funding has not been sufficient to implement the new standards. Additionally, the federal government provides support for preschool primarily through the Early Head Start and Head Start program, as well as funding for states to build or support state-sponsored preschool programs. United Way has partnered with advocacy organizations and coalitions to increase funding for these crucial programs. But funding gaps to meet the need for high-quality early childhood learning programs across the U.S. persist.

United Way will fight for:

- Increased CCDBG funding to improve access to high quality child care for all children, especially for low-income children.
- Increased funding for, and access to, high quality early childhood programs via Early Head Start, Head Start, and state-sponsored Pre-K programs.
- Increased funding and/or set-asides as part of existing funding streams, to support professional development and training for early childhood staff to strengthen program quality.

Support the funding and effective implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

While a post-secondary degree is necessary to compete in the global economy, one in three students graduating from high school are not prepared for college. In 2015, 46 percent of white students and 49 percent of Asian students graduated high school ready for college in comparison to 17 percent of black and 25 percent of Hispanic students. These preparation gaps reflect disparities in access to high-quality teachers, rigorous coursework aligned with college entry standards, and well-resourced schools that can provide additional supports as needed. Black and Hispanic children and youth are more likely to attend high-poverty schools, and research shows that all students fare worse academically in schools with higher concentrations of poverty.
In 2015, Congress passed the long overdue reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Through a variety of policies and programs, ESSA attempts to ensure that every student graduates ready for college or a career. The law includes critical protections for disadvantaged students, additional supports and accountability requirements for low performing schools, and authorizes promising and proven programs that supplement and advance efforts to improve our nation’s schools.

**United Way will fight for:**

- The implementation of ESSA’s provisions with fidelity at the state level, to protect disadvantaged groups and to ensure that families and communities are engaged in these efforts.
- Increased funding for the critical programs authorized in ESSA that address literacy, out-of-school time, and wraparound supports such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Full-Service Community Schools Program.

**Expand opportunities for students to obtain a post-secondary credential.**

Over the next 10 years, United Way will work to help 5 million people get better jobs. By 2020, an estimated 35 percent of job openings will require at least a bachelor’s degree and another 30 percent will require at least some college or an associate degree. However, the nature of our low-wage job market, lack of economic mobility, and rising college tuitions combine to create a major cost barrier for low and moderate-income families. Federal grants and tax credits alleviate some, but not nearly enough of this burden. For low-income students, additional barriers such as lack of preparedness, information, and adequate supports, are significant obstacles to college access and completion. Low and moderate-income students who do attend college acquire astronomical amounts of debt, borrowing over 50 percent more than their peers did 10 years ago. Black and low-income students borrow more, and more often, just to receive a bachelor’s degree, even at public institutions. While less than 63 percent of white graduates from public institutions borrow to fund their education, 81 percent of black graduates do so.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Federal efforts to increase college access, persistence and completion through the Higher Education Act.
- Strengthened programs and policies that minimize student debt and help families make more informed borrowing decisions such as the federal Pell Grant program.
- Funding for federal programs that provide youth with alternative pathways to post-secondary education and the careers of their choice, through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act and other federal programs.
FINANCIAL STABILITY
PROMOTING FINANCIAL STABILITY AND INDEPENDENCE
"We know that communities are stronger when every individual and family, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, is financially stable and has the opportunity for economic mobility."

In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that household incomes in America continue to rise and the rate of poverty continues to decline. While these gains are encouraging, close to 40 million Americans still live in poverty, which the federal government characterizes as a family of four living on $25,000 a year. The number of Americans struggling to get by is higher when accounting for the cost of child care, medical expenses, taxes, and other variables.

The state of poverty in our nation is even more striking when acknowledging the abundance of disparities across race; the percentage of Americans of color living in poverty is more than double that of white Americans. And while the Census data suggests we are moving in the right direction collectively, we need to ensure we are moving forward in a way that includes every person in every community.

That’s why, over the next 10 years, United Way is working to ensure that 5 million people in the United States get better jobs. We know that communities are stronger when every individual and family, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, is financially stable and has the opportunity for economic mobility. Americans are best positioned for economic mobility when they have quality education that leads to good-paying jobs that allows them to access safe, affordable housing and save for the future. For low and moderate-income Americans, supports like the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, and programs that provide food to children and families, are instrumental in helping families cover the basics while encouraging and supporting work.

The United Way network invests in and supports a variety of programs that help workers secure and maintain employment, access tax credits, find stable housing, and build savings and assets for the long-term—including through local and state policy efforts. United Way will focus its advocacy efforts on the following financial stability policies.

**Strengthen workforce development programs and expand job training and work-based learning.**

Middle skill jobs—those requiring more than a high school diploma, but not a four-year degree—make up 53 percent of today’s labor market, but only 43 percent of U.S. workers are trained at this level. This creates a skills gap, leaving businesses struggling to find workers with appropriate skills, and workers without meaningful pathways to better paying jobs.

Workforce development programs are critical to helping individuals access the education, training, credentials, and support services they need to secure good paying jobs and allow employers to align training with the skills they need.

In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law, reauthorizing core workforce programs through 2020. WIOA creates and strengthens job training programs nationwide. Adequate funding and effective implementation of quality workforce development programs continues to be critically important to ensure that every American can gain the skills necessary to obtain a family-sustaining career.

Additionally, investments in higher education and job training programs help older youth acquire the skills, training and mentorship to make a successful transition from school to work.
Currently, there are 4.6 million Opportunity Youth in the United States. Opportunity Youth are young people aged 16 to 24 who are considered disconnected because they are neither working nor in school. The gap in rates of disconnection between racial and ethnic groups is nearly 20 percentage points. Asian youth have the lowest rates of disconnection at 6.6 percent, followed by white (9.2 percent), Hispanic (13.7 percent), black (17.2 percent), and Native American (25.8 percent) youth.\textsuperscript{xxvii} The negative effects of youth disconnection ricochet across the economy, the social sector, the criminal justice system, and the political landscape, impacting everyone.

To ensure more youth are on track to obtain a family-sustaining career, we must improve the school-to-work pipeline for available jobs, ensure that youth acquire the social-emotional skills needed in the workplace, and strengthen access to paid work experience through transitional jobs, summer employment, apprenticeships and internships.

\textit{United Way will fight for:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Investments in high quality education and job training programs for 16-to-24-year-olds who are not in school or work.
  \item Apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities that allow older youth and low-income workers to gain work experience that improve job placement. Increased funding for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), national service programs that provide valuable job experiences to young adults, and work-based learning opportunities in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.
  \item Incentivized sector-based strategies that help meet employer demand for a more educated and skilled workplace.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Protect and expand the refundable tax credits and increase access to them through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance grant program.}

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) are refundable credits that allow working families to keep more of what they earn to pay for necessities like reliable transportation, child care and groceries. Together the EITC and CTC lifted 8.9 million people out of poverty in 2016\textsuperscript{xxviii}. Many individuals and families connect to the EITC and CTC at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, where IRS-certified volunteers help low-income workers accurately complete their tax returns for free, connecting millions of people to billions of dollars.

Despite the success of the credits, millions of low-income working Americans not raising children at home are largely excluded from the EITC, including young people striving to get a foothold in the workforce, non-custodial parents, and veterans and military service members. Approximately 7.5 million workers teetering on the edge of poverty are taxed over the ledge, or made to fall deeper, primarily because the EITC is too small to offset income and payroll taxes\textsuperscript{xxix}. Further, millions of the lowest income working families cannot access the full amount of the Child Tax Credit due to the inadequacy of the current structure.

\textit{United Way will fight for:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit for workers not raising children at home and those 21 and older (lowering eligibility age from 25).
  \item A Child Tax Credit that ensures the lowest income workers and families with young children can access a robust credit.
  \item Permanent authorization of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance grant program and increased investments in this public-private partnership.
\end{itemize}
Strengthen Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Child Nutrition Programs, and other nutrition-related income supports.

About 13 percent of Americans, including one in six children, are at risk for hunger. Food insecurity exists in every county in the U.S., and rates of food insecurity are more than double for black and Hispanic households as compared to non-Hispanic white households. Stable access to nutritious food is critical for healthy child development and academic success. Nutrition-related income supports like the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program and Summer Food Service Program (collectively known as the Child Nutrition programs), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Women Infants and Children (WIC), stabilize families when their incomes and assets are limited and ensure babies, mothers, children and families have access to nutritious food in tough times.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Protecting SNAP's integrity and ensuring intended beneficiaries continue to have access to SNAP.
- Child Nutrition program reauthorization that protects and strengthens access to healthy food.
- Increased funding for WIC.

Support policies to improve the nation’s affordable and emergency housing options and supports.

In the past decade it has been increasingly challenging for families to secure affordable housing as incomes have not kept pace with housing and utility costs. Additionally, the rising cost of housing places a greater strain on renters, as they generally have lower incomes and are twice as likely to pay more than half of their incomes on housing. From 2001 to 2015, median national rents rose by 32 percent from 2001 to 2015, while wages remained flat. A survey by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition found that a worker earning the state minimum wage could afford a market-rate one-bedroom apartment in only 22 of the U.S.’s 3,000 counties. The high cost of housing leaves working families particularly vulnerable to eviction or foreclosure if their income is interrupted.

With the cost of housing burdening many families, job loss, evictions, health problems, and exiting domestic violence situations can lead to temporary or prolonged homelessness which disproportionately affects minority groups, such as black Americans, who make up 40 percent of the homeless population. Further, more than 40,000 veterans are homeless and struggle with their own unique set of needs, sometimes displaced without support networks or living with lingering effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The limited supply of affordable housing, coupled with long waiting lists and confusing application processes for public housing can make it difficult for low-income working families to obtain affordable housing. Emergency assistance that provides utility support, keeps people in their homes, and provides pathways out of homelessness are critical supports.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Funding and protection of the Section 8 Housing Program and the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program to increase rental assistance to low-income families and veterans.
- Funding for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program. Full funding and protection of programs like the National Housing Trust Fund, Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Program, Low Income Housing Tax Credit and the HOME block grant to increase the stock of affordable housing.
COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING
BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO ADVANCE THE COMMON GOOD

United We Fight. United We Win. United Way Public Policy Agenda for the 116th U.S. Congress
"Strong nonprofits that are supported and valued by government can work in partnership with government at all levels to address the complex issues facing their communities and create opportunity for all Americans."

Nonprofit organizations like United Way play a vital role in communities by helping those who need it most. And although the national economic outlook is improving, many hard-working families still must choose between putting food on the table, going to the doctor, or keeping the lights on. Middle class workers and families both support and rely on help from United Way and its nonprofit partners. The need for a robust nonprofit sector and government recognition of the sector’s vital role in our society is now more apparent than ever as charities alone cannot meet the needs of our nation. Nonprofit organizations provide critical services that contribute to healthy, educated and economically stable communities. Strong nonprofits that are supported and valued by government can work in partnership with government at all levels to address the complex issues facing communities and create opportunity for all Americans.

United Way will fight for policy initiatives that strengthen communities by enhancing the nonprofit sector’s capacity to serve through tax policy, expanding the 2-1-1 network, supporting national service programs, protecting human rights and supporting laws and regulations that encourage philanthropy.

Protect and expand charitable giving incentives.

Americans overwhelmingly trust charities and support policies that create incentives for charitable giving. A 2016 survey commissioned by Independent Sector indicates that 88 percent of voters believe that it should be easier for people to deduct charitable contributions from their taxes.

While Americans are primarily motivated to give for altruistic reasons, tax incentives allow more people to increase their giving. Similarly, businesses can provide more support to charities when tax policies enhance incentives for giving.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Expansion of charitable giving incentives to millions of middle-class workers who do not itemize their taxes.
- Existing federal tax incentives, including the charitable deduction.
- Individual and business tax incentives that provide critical support to charities across the country.
Strengthen and expand 2-1-1.

2-1-1 is a critical information and referral service that connects millions of Americans to vital, non-emergency, health and human services, and is funded, operated and supported by United Ways in local communities across the United States. This free and confidential referral service connects seniors to food and healthcare services, veterans to education, employment and suicide prevention, individuals to opioid addiction treatment services, families to financial crisis supports, and former prisoners to re-entry programs among other services. In times of natural disasters 2-1-1 is a vital link to critical recovery resources and is a vital partner with local and state governments in recovery efforts. Currently 2-1-1 can be reached by 94 percent of Americans in their local communities, but serious gaps remain for millions of Americans due to a lack of federal resources to support the network’s 24/7 capacity. More work is needed for the 2-1-1 network to attain its full potential to be a resource that can strengthen families and local communities.

United Way will fight for:

- The creation of 2-1-1 texting capability so every American can connect with vital services.
- Opportunities for 2-1-1 to secure funding from federal government agencies.
- Investments in 2-1-1’s disaster recovery services through partnerships with government agencies like FEMA.

Protect and expand National Service Programs.

National and community service is a core American value. National Service programs create volunteer opportunities for Americans and expand capacity for nonprofit organizations to strengthen local communities. Recent research found a positive link between serving in AmeriCorps and employment opportunities. In its 2017 report, the Corporation for National and Community Service found that national service not only creates jobs but provides pathways to employment for young adults. In addition, for many United Ways, RSVP, SeniorCorps and other AmeriCorps programs provide critical programming support in their work with low-income individuals, children and veterans. National service programs enable local nonprofits to leverage additional external revenue of up to $1.3 billion nationally.

United Way will fight for:

- The protection and increase of federal investments in the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps.

Expand and strengthen programs that prevent human trafficking, punish offenders and support survivors.

Human trafficking is one of the greatest under-addressed issues of our time. There are more than 40 million victims of human trafficking around the world and human trafficking cases have been reported in every country in the world, and in every state and territory in the U.S.

According to a groundbreaking report, human trafficking and modern slavery is more prevalent in developed countries, like the United States, than previously estimated.
The 2018 Global Slavery Index estimates that 400,000 people are living in modern slavery in the United States right now. Victims are men, women, girls and boys, U.S. citizens and foreign nationals. While more research on the victims of human trafficking is needed, we know that the majority come from vulnerable populations, including runaway and homeless youth, foster children, migrants, and individuals that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ). They are also disproportionately people of color.

The International Labor Organization estimates that traffickers make more than $150 billion in profit annually. Current U.S. investments to combat human trafficking are anemic, totaling a little more than $200 million per year for both domestic and international programs. To combat this global crime, we need dramatic increases in funding and enhanced U.S. leadership to elevate, prioritize and fund proven interventions to cease human trafficking at home and abroad. Additionally, public policy should provide incentives that reward businesses for eliminating sex and labor trafficking from their operations and supply chains.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Increased U.S. investments and diplomatic leadership in anti-trafficking efforts.
- The protection of human trafficking victims, particularly for children and vulnerable populations, and promotion of social services for survivors.
- Policies that address modern slavery and human trafficking in business supply chains.

**Advocate for policies and regulations that support nonprofits.**

Many policies and regulations designed for the business community to remain robust and successful, also apply to nonprofit organizations. Because of the distinct nature of how nonprofits operate, these policies often have an unintended negative impact on the ability of nonprofits to benefit the public. United Way’s leading role as one of the largest non-governmental funders of health and human services in local communities requires us to be vigilant on issues affecting the entire sector, and to work to ensure laws and regulations promote and strengthen the nonprofit sector.

The Combined Federal Campaign is an important source of funding for the nonprofit sector. Historically it was the single largest source of charitable giving, raising more than $280 million per year for large and small nonprofits across the United States. Since Congress changed how the federal campaign was managed in 2015, the dollars raised dropped from $167 million in 2016 to $101 million in 2017. Congress must address the campaign management problems to revitalize the program.

**United Way will fight for:**

- Policies that support the critical work done by charities and foundations.
- The revitalization the Combined Federal Campaign.
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National Urban League
National Network for Youth
National Women’s Law Center
Prosperity Now
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Voices for National Service
YMCA
Young Invincibles

UNITED WAY ADVISORY GROUPS
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