2020
PUBLIC POLICY
AGENDA
Georgia’s greatest resource is its people and public policies can either block – or unlock – the conditions that invite children and adults to fully realize their potential, talents and skills.

Such a state of well-being is like an edifice built from many materials. Effective health, education and human service policy is essential but so too are integrated economic development, revenue and spending policies to undergird opportunities to achieve well-being among everyone.

Communities thrive when every child and adult have the chance to achieve well-being. This is because effective communities rely upon the interpersonal networks of its members to build trust and cooperation and, in turn, new opportunities to prosper.

Making Georgians’ well-being our top priority requires commitment and teamwork. Cooperation among diverse policymakers working across disciplines along with community leaders and families, is needed to build – and maintain – the conditions that allow everyone to achieve their full potential.

### It Starts with the Children

Almost half a million children in Greater Atlanta are growing up in circumstances of low well-being with dim prospects for good health, academic and career success or stability at home. To determine the factors that drive child well-being, United Way worked with the Atlanta Regional Commission, Neighborhood Nexus and community volunteers to come up with 14 key indicators. Together, these measures comprise the Child Well-Being Index.

When our children have a high level of well-being, it is a sign that the entire community is on track to succeed. The Child Well-Being Index gives policymakers and community leaders a snapshot of existing conditions and a set of common goals upon which to integrate public policy and to leverage our collective impact.

The United Way of Greater Atlanta is the first in the nation to align its work around child well-being and to commit to fighting for better measures of it in every zip code. Join us!
Living conditions in neighborhoods and communities have a profound effect upon the ability of children and adults to achieve well-being. In 2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to:

• Enact policies that make affordable, safe and stable housing accessible to all Georgians. Housing, an essential element of well-being, eludes many due to cost, leasing practices, zoning, code enforcement, disability, age or household composition.

• Help Georgians persevere through difficult transitions to well-being by offering the services and supports needed to overcome a disability or addictive disease, re-enter the community from the criminal justice system, or to recover from homelessness or family violence.

• Make sure that Georgia’s criminal and juvenile justice systems, from pretrial to probation, both protects the public and prioritizes rehabilitation and reentry among detainees and offenders through accountability courts, mental health and addictive disease treatment, education and vocational training.

• Prioritize Community-Oriented Policing in state and local policy. COPS, a recognized best practice, relies upon building trusting relationships among law enforcement and members of a community to prevent and respond to disorder and crime.

• Keep firearms out of the hands of those who present a danger to themselves or to others by enacting a “red flag” law, aligning state family violence policy with federal law and closing loopholes in required background checks.
What happens to a child from birth until the point that the brain matures, believed to be age 25, can limit or unleash their potential. Their experiences during these years affect how well they achieve academic success, earn a living, parent their own children and steward their communities. In 2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to:

• Keep infants and toddlers from the lifelong consequences of disruptions in brain structure and function by screening them for mental health and developmental disorders unique to their age and covering the cost of appropriate interventions with caregivers.

• Provide more children with a foundation for academic success by increasing lottery funded Pre-K slots, reducing class size and investing in a quality workforce.

• Promote academic success in K-12 schools by building equity into the state funding formula to account for differences in student characteristics and by making investments to improve school climate and student behavioral health.

• Protect children from abuse and neglect by fully funding Georgia’s child welfare system and by implementing the federal Families First Prevention Services Act to proactively offer the services that can keep children and caregivers from separation.

• Increase the odds for lifetime health by raising the legal age to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21 and regulating the sale and use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices.
Parents and other caregivers often need a hand-up to achieve well-being for themselves and their children. In 2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to:

• Give Georgians access to health care by expanding the Medicaid program as authorized by the Affordable Care Act, lowering the cost of private insurance products covering essential health benefits, and covering interventions to prevent pregnancy-related health conditions following a birth.

• Remove barriers to completing a post-secondary educational credential that leads to new or better employment among traditional and adult students.

• Support family-friendly workplace policies and strengthen the earnings of low-income families by enacting a state earned income tax credit.

• Increase the availability of affordable childcare by raising the eligibility threshold for publicly funded subsidies to 65 percent of state median income and by raising provider reimbursement rates.

• Give Georgians with a criminal conviction, including adult survivors of trafficking, the opportunity to seal their records from public view to eliminate lifetime barriers to employment, housing, higher education and family formation.
Overall Child Well-Being is about the status of children, families, and the community. The Child Well-Being Index is a measurement tool that aggregates the most recent data available from all three dimensions. We acknowledge that there is no perfect data set and many different indicators that could be used to assess child well-being. The 14 indicators below were selected after rigorous research and a community review process led by the United Way Community Data Committee.

- % Low Weight Births
- % Students Exceeding 3rd Grade Reading Standards
- % Students Exceeding 8th Grade Math Standards
- High School College & Career Readiness Score
- High School Graduation Rate
- % Children without Health Insurance
- % Children in Poverty
- % Families Not Financially Stable
- % Families with Housing Cost Burden
- % Births to Moms Without a High School Diploma
- % Enrolled in Post-Secondary Education
- % Adults Without a High School Diploma
- % Adults Without Health Insurance
- Unemployment Rate

The Child Well-Being Index and other data in the data snapshot comes from a variety of sources and reflects the most recent available data for 2015. 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.
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.

The United Way of Greater Atlanta has a board level public policy and advocacy committee that recommends an annual agenda. In developing the agenda, the committee leverages its robust relationships with the network of United Way affiliates represented by the United Ways of Georgia, a state membership organization.

The 2020 Public Policy Agenda

Today, many of the 2.5 million children living in Georgia live in communities of low child well-being – where multiple factors in their environment prevent children from reaching their full potential as adults.

Thriving communities start with thriving children, and that’s why United Way’s new focus is on child well-being.

Our public policy and advocacy agenda for 2020 is therefore focused on policy issues that are aligned with the identified drivers and barriers to advancing child well-being.