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Arise seeks to remove food sales tax

Advocacy group wants to bridge the gap between working poor, wealthier Alabamians

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MONTGOMERY — An advocacy group wants to eliminate the state sales tax on food to ease the tax burden on poor people.

Alabama Arise Director Kimble Forrister said Monday that his organization believes Alabama's sales tax on food unduly burdens the state's poorest people.

Forrister and Ron Gilbert, senior policy analyst for the Arise Citizens Policy Project, highlighted the issue as one way to bridge the gap between the state's working poor and wealthier Alabamians.

30 recommendations

The issue is one of 30 recommendations in "Bridging the Gap," a new policy project report on how economic prosperity eludes poorer families, including those who have jobs, in Alabama.

The organization is working with Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, on legislation to remove the food sales tax.

Knight, who chairs the House General Fund budget committee, said he wants legislation that eliminates the tax on food and replaces it with another source of revenue.

He said one possible way is to remove the deduction for federal income tax that Alabama allows on state tax forms.

Revenue estimates put the figure at about \$300 million per year. Only three other states still allow the federal income tax deduction on state tax returns, Gilbert said.

Make up the difference

Melissa Gilbert, an Arise legislative liaison, said state income-tax payers could deduct the higher state tax on federal income tax returns to partially make up the difference.

“Low-income working families need representation in the Alabama Legislature,” Knight told reporters at an Arise news conference Monday.

Knight said he is proud of the economic advances and legislative incentives that the state supplied to attract new industry, but not as proud of what the state has done for poor families.

Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, who chairs a House poverty task force, said poverty affects everyone in the state and Alabama needs to do more to move people up the economic ladder. Todd also supports removing the sales tax on food.