



## NEWS RELEASE

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For more information, contact:

Chris Sanders at (334) 832-9060 | [chris@alarise.org](mailto:chris@alarise.org)

### **Medicaid expansion, payday lending reform highlight Arise's 2017 priorities**

*Minimum wage, 'ban the box' law, public transportation among other issues chosen at annual membership meeting*

Medicaid expansion, consumer-friendly lending reforms and creation of a state minimum wage are among the goals on Alabama Arise's 2017 legislative agenda. Nearly 300 Arise members picked the group's issue priorities at its annual meeting Saturday in Montgomery. The eight goals chosen were:

- Tax reform, including untaxing groceries and closing corporate income tax loopholes;
- Adequate funding for vital services like education, health care and child care, including Medicaid expansion and approval of new tax revenue for General Fund services;
- Creation of a state minimum wage to help families make ends meet;
- Interest rate caps for payday loans and auto title loans in Alabama;
- "Ban the box" legislation to remove the criminal history checkbox from job applications so employers can consider an applicant's qualifications first before a background check;
- State funding for public transportation in rural, urban and suburban areas;
- Reforms of Alabama's death penalty system to add transparency and end the practice of allowing judges to impose capital punishment despite a jury recommendation against it; and
- Dedicated state revenue for the Alabama Housing Trust Fund to help expand housing opportunities for low-income Alabamians.

"We believe in a more just and inclusive society for all Alabamians, and these proposals are a roadmap to get us there," Arise state coordinator Kimble Forrister said. "We're excited to renew our work for policy changes to help hard-working Alabamians build a better life for their children."

Nearly 300,000 uninsured adult Alabamians – most of them working adults and college students – would benefit from Medicaid expansion. "Closing the Medicaid coverage gap would keep workers and students healthier and more productive," Forrister said. "It also would create thousands of new jobs and allow Alabama to save state money on mental health care and other important services."

Alabama allows payday and title loans to carry annual interest rates of 456 percent and 300 percent, respectively. The movement for consumer-friendly reform has broad support and keeps gaining momentum, Forrister said. The state Senate voted overwhelmingly this year to reduce interest rates on payday loans, and about two dozen cities have placed moratoriums on new high-cost lenders.

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[Alabama Arise](http://alarise.org) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of congregations, organizations and individuals promoting public policies to improve the lives of low-income Alabamians.