



Report

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Upcoming events

March 13, Fairhope – Baldwin County Arise meeting, Fairhope Friends Meeting Place, [6 p.m.](#)

March 14, Mobile – Mobile County Arise meeting, Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, [6 p.m.](#)

Thank you to 3 great Arise staffers!



Robyn Hyden



Shakita Jones



Stephen Stetson

Organizers Robyn Hyden and Shakita Jones and policy analyst Stephen Stetson are leaving our staff as our health care reform grants come to an end. Shakita, a social worker, became our organizer for the middle of the state in 2008. That same year, Stephen, a lawyer, became our policy analyst on numerous issues. Robyn came on board in 2013 as a north Alabama organizer, and now moves to United Way of Central Alabama.

They're three of the most creative, dedicated and energetic people with whom we've ever worked. We'll miss Stephen's witty op-eds, Robyn's social media prowess and Shakita's reality checks on our messaging. We're going to hear great things from them, and they've promised to keep in touch with Arise from their new positions.

By *Chris Sanders, communications director*

One of the most inspirational things about Arise members is that you never give up. Our supporters are passionate and persistent: You identify the policy changes needed to expand opportunity and improve life for all Alabamians, and then you put in the hard work needed to help make those things happen. Even when critics might call the effort hopeless, you keep the faith and keep on pushing to bring our shared vision of a stronger, more inclusive Alabama to life.

Your persistence can make possible what once seemed impossible. Alabama lawmakers are moving quickly this year to end judicial overrides in the state's death penalty process. (*See Page 2 for more.*) It's a proposal that appears on the surface to have become an overnight success after years of going nowhere legislatively. But that success didn't happen in a vacuum: It resulted in no small part from years of determined advocacy from folks like you.

We hope to duplicate that success on many other issues in the coming years. We're hopeful that the state grocery tax will end sooner rather than later. We're hopeful that lawmakers will see how a "ban the box" law would help people rebuild their lives and provide for their families. We're hopeful that Alabama will raise the minimum wage and strengthen consumer protections and invest more in housing, transportation, health care and so many other needs. We're hopeful for a better future – and your work is laying the foundation to make those hopes a reality.

You've laid groundwork to end judicial override **What we're watching on Goat Hill**

Bills of interest on key Arise issues in 2017:

"Ban the box" policy: [HB 280](#) and [SB 200](#) would bar state and local governments from asking job applicants about conviction history prior to making a job offer.

Death penalty reform: [HB 32](#) and [SB 16](#) would end judicial overrides of jury sentencing recommendations in death penalty cases. (*See Page 2 and the enclosed fact sheet for more information.*)

Grocery tax: [HB 44](#) would end the state sales tax on groceries but wouldn't replace the lost education revenue.

Housing Trust Fund: [HB 159](#) would increase the state mortgage record fee to provide dedicated revenue for the Alabama Housing Trust Fund.

Minimum wage: [HB 26](#) would create a state minimum wage of \$10 per hour and regularly adjust it for inflation.

State budgets: [HB 171](#) and [SB 129](#) are the Education Trust Fund budget bills. [HB 155](#) and [SB 150](#) are the General Fund budget bills.

Tax reform: [SB 67](#) would require "combined reporting," treating parent corporations and their subsidiaries as one entity for income tax purposes.

Visit arisecitizens.org and click on "Current bills of interest" for weekly updates on these measures and others throughout the Alabama Legislature's 2017 regular session.



A few words from Kimble

By Kimble Forrister,
executive director

In case you didn't see my good news/bad news email last month:

We ended 2016 with a record-breaking flourish of member giving. (Check out all the December donors listed in this newsletter!) But we also learned after the election that our health grants would end as foundations shift grant money to "more strategic" states.

For eight of the last 10 years, we've received \$250,000 for health care reform work

in our \$800,000 budget. Now, through no fault of our own, our budget is dropping back to about \$600,000 just as the challenges increase. We've lost three talented staffers: organizers Robyn Hyden and Shakita Jones and policy analyst Stephen Stetson (though we still have Shakita as a social work intern this semester). Four remaining staffers are cutting hours as well. Please be patient with us as we adjust our workload.

These changes mean we're counting on our members more than ever.

We have more than 1,000 paid-up donors, which means more people at our annual meeting and our Legislative Day, and more people making calls and responding to email alerts. You are the core of our advocacy and financial stability. Y'all gave more than \$110,000 last year to match our health care grants. It's because of you that the Babcock, Ford and Marguerite Casey foundations continue to believe Arise folks know how to maneuver with a difficult legislature, protect our gains and achieve meaningful breakthroughs.

It's impressive that so many of you keep prodding our state to care for its most vulnerable people. Keep up the good work!

With peace,

Arise-backed bills advance in Senate, House End to judicial override draws closer

By Chris Sanders, communications director

The era of judicial overrides in Alabama's death penalty system may be nearing an end. The Senate voted 30-1 Thursday to end the practice, and the House Judiciary Committee voted 10-2 last week for a similar bill. Arise members for years have urged an end to the policy of allowing judges to override juries' recommended sentences in death penalty cases.

Alabama is the last state in the country to allow judicial override in capital cases. A pair of bills – HB 32, sponsored by Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa, and SB 16, sponsored by Sen. Dick Brewbaker, R-Pike Road – would end that status.

England's bill also would require a unanimous jury vote to impose the death penalty. Current state law allows juries to recommend death if 10 of 12 jurors agree. That makes Alabama one of four states to allow non-unanimous juries to recommend a death sentence.

The House committee rejected an attempt to remove the unanimity requirement from England's bill.

Judicial override regularly is used to impose death sentences despite a jury's recommendation of life in prison without the possibility of parole. Alabama judges used judicial override 112 times between 1978 and early 2016, according to the Equal Justice Initiative. In 101 of those instances (or 90.2 percent), override was used to impose a death sentence despite a jury's sentencing recommendation of life without parole.

Arise policy analyst Stephen Stetson this month testified before a Senate committee in favor of ending judicial override and requiring unanimity for juries to impose a death sentence. "Members of a jury can reach the best result," Stetson told senators.

Read the enclosed fact sheet for more on the history and shortcomings of judicial override in Alabama.

Thank you for your support!

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