



Report

Vol. 20, No. 3

May 26, 2017

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Save the date!

Arise annual meeting
Saturday, Sept. 16, 2017
9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Montgomery

Upcoming events

June 12, Fairhope – Baldwin County Arise meeting, Fairhope Friends Meeting Place, 6 p.m.

June 13, Huntsville – Listening session, 5:30-7 p.m., Trinity UMC, 607 Airport Rd., SW. For more info, call Stan at (205) 215-9400.

June 13, Mobile – Mobile Arise meeting, Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, 6 p.m.

Issue proposal deadline

Friday, July 28 is the deadline for member groups to submit proposals for new 2018 issue priorities to be considered at this year's Arise annual meeting on Sept. 16. If your issue is an existing priority, you don't need to resubmit it unless you seek a major strategic change. For more info, email organizing director Presdelane Harris at pres@alarise.org.

Historic win and near misses mark 2017 session **Judicial override is over!**

By *Jim Carnes, policy director*

Rarely does the Alabama Legislature get to stop a bad practice nationwide.

But that's just what happened April 11 when Gov. Kay Ivey signed SB 16 (by Sen. Dick Brewbaker, R-Montgomery) to end judicial override in capital cases. Alabama was the last state that still allowed judges to impose the death penalty after a jury had recommended a life sentence. The historic bill was the first Ivey signed into law after taking office and a big win for Arise and our partners in advocacy for death penalty reform.

The 2017 legislative session, which ended May 19, saw strong movement on several other Arise priorities:

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

A new strategy shifted the conversation on public transportation. After more than a decade of unproductive attempts to break the constitutional prohibition against funding public transit with gas taxes, Arise this year proposed the Public Transportation Trust Fund as a repository for dedicated revenues in the future. Unlike previous transit proposals, SB 360 (by Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham) passed the Senate without controversy and won unanimous approval in a House committee. In the closing days of the session, the bill made it onto three daily House calendars, thanks to House sponsor Rep. Jack Williams (R-Vestavia), but failed to receive floor debate. This year's notable progress puts the proposal in a favorable position for both off-season advocacy development and a new legislative push next year.

"BAN THE BOX"

The national movement to eliminate the criminal history checkbox from job applications picked up steam in Alabama this session. SB 200 (by Sen. Quinton Ross, R-Montgomery), which would "ban the box" for state and local government employment, passed the Senate on May 11 but failed to come up for consideration in a House committee. A growing list of municipalities and corporations adopting the policy could strengthen the effort.

PREDATORY LENDING

Once again, neither payday lenders nor consumer advocates were able to push a bill through. Considering the formidable resources of the industry, a "draw" amounted to a victory for Arise and our partners. HB 535 (by Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville), offered minor reforms with a major loophole allowing

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Farewell, Rebecca!

For more than a decade, Rebecca Jackson has graced Arise with

her passion, her commitment – and her cactus garden. Her gifts as a natural "connector" have helped Arise break new ground in all areas of our work, from policy to development to advocacy and outreach. She now moves her talents to VOICES for Alabama's Children. We're glad that's just one floor down. All the best, Rebecca!





A few words from Kimble

By Kimble Forrister,
executive director

In uncertain times, we got some reassurance this year. Remember how we started 2017? We were low on staff but high in number of members. We had lost health grants after Trump was elected, but our member giving was breaking records. We challenged you, our members, to keep up the good work, because it's more important than ever.

Y'all stepped up to the plate. We had record turnout for this year's Legislative Day, filling the halls of the State House to visit your lawmakers about the bill by Sen. Dick Brewbaker and Rep. Chris England to end judicial override. You also responded to our alerts on health care, payday lending and the Child Care Safety Bill. I know some of you forward those alerts to others, and quite a few of our Facebook fans hit your "Share" buttons, especially on the video where Jim explained the Medicaid block grant proposal. We're seeing stronger attendance at local meetings as well.

You continue to break member giving records. We're on track to end our fiscal year June 30 with more members and far higher giving than ever before. We figure some of that surge has to do with people wanting to speak up in this critical political moment, and some is because folks are charged up on issues like health care, safety net fairness, payday lending and the criminal justice system. The legislative results are recounted in this newsletter.

Thanks to the federal courts, we may yet face a special session on prison issues. Our advocacy for "just mercy" could touch a familiar theme – how we treat "the least of these," "sick or in prison."

Yours in hope,

Arise Citizens' Policy Project Report

Budgets offer stark vision of FY '18

By Carol Gundlach, policy analyst

The Alabama Legislature last week passed 2018 state budgets that once again fall short of meeting critical needs. While lawmakers avoided a repeat of last year's General Fund (GF) crisis, which required a special session to resolve, the new budgets highlight structural flaws that will continue to hinder public services until leaders and voters approve fundamental tax reform.

Medicaid dodged a bullet in the GF. The barebones program that underpins our entire statewide health system may be able to squeeze by with so-called level funding – the same roughly \$700 million in state funds as last year – plus the second and final \$105 million installment of BP oil spill settlement funds. The lack of an increase deepens concerns about the scaled-back launch of regional care organizations (RCOs), already delayed to October 1. Level funding for other GF agencies such as Mental Health, Public Health and Corrections leaves them ill-prepared for contingencies like lawsuits and outbreaks of illness.

Of the other GF agencies, only trial courts and the severely stressed juvenile probation officers (JPO) program received small increases (\$1.3 million for the courts and \$1.8 million for JPOs). But in neither case did increased funding keep pace with the increased need.

On the Education Trust Fund (ETF) side, the picture is only slightly better. A \$24 million increase for K-12 education allows for the hiring of about 150 additional, and much-needed, elementary teachers. Alabama's well-regarded but not universally available pre-kindergarten program got a \$13.2 million boost.

Higher education received a \$4.6 million increase in the ETF, but nearly all of it went to Alabama's National Guard scholarship program. Costs for this program have grown rapidly in recent years, restricting the Legislature's ability to provide increases

for other purposes in higher education. The 2018 ETF also gave a \$26.4 million increase to Veterans Affairs for scholarships for disabled veterans and their families. Community colleges, which provide much of the state's workforce development, were essentially level-funded, as was the Department of Commerce's workforce development program. Mental Health received a \$3.5 million increase from the ETF, much less than the \$10.5 needed to settle the anticipated lawsuit over mental health services for low-income children.

Avoiding an emergency special session to fill a budget gap is a very low bar for measuring legislative success. Even worse is Alabama's habit of defining "level funding" as "same dollar amount." A better practice is to calculate a "current services budget" that keeps up with inflation and population growth. Only a bold move on tax reform can stop the steady deterioration caused by inadequate budgets year after year.

Thank you, interns!

The energy of three social work interns brightened the spring for us at ACPP. Tracy Wilson and Shakita Jones were master's level students at the University of Alabama, and Ashton Kupferberg was working on her bachelor's degree at the University of Montevallo.

Shakita used her internship to hone her research and policy skills. Tracy brought with him a passion for criminal justice reform. And Ashton focused on the intersection between economic and environmental justice. While at Arise, they learned how the "sausage" of legislation is made and how Arise's activist members help pass bills that move us closer to justice for the poor.

Ashton has now graduated from Montevallo and is exploring future opportunities. Shakita continues her

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Thank you for your support!

Arise Citizens' Policy Project thanks the following donors for their contributions received between March 1 and April 30, 2017:

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In honor of Dr. Cliff Pringle:
Billie Pringle, Mobile

Session wrap-up

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two-week loans to continue. Advocates contended that without an amendment setting a 30-day minimum term, the bill should die, and it did. Arise preferred SB 284 (by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur), a comprehensive bill that failed to reach the floor. Installment lenders did gain a fee hike and an expanded definition of their product with HB 314 (by Rep. Ken Johnson, R-Moulton), which Arise and our partners had opposed.

CHILD CARE LICENSURE

Arise joined a well-organized effort by VOICES for Alabama's Children in support of HB 277 (by Rep. Pebblin

Warren, D-Tuskegee) to require licensure for all child care facilities.

After a compromise allowing facilities that don't accept state subsidies to be inspected without licensure, the bill passed the House and a Senate committee. A late flurry of unforeseen amendments prompted the Senate sponsor, Sen. Cam Ward (R-Alabaster), to withdraw the bill. Strong leadership and hard-won compromise bode well for this bill's prospects next year.

HOUSING TRUST FUND

Five years after its creation, the Housing Trust Fund moved a step closer to operation when a House committee held a public hearing on HB 159 (Todd), which would provide a revenue source for the fund. It was the first public hearing for the bill, offering a way for a range of stakeholders to educate committee members. The hearing laid groundwork for 2018.

Interns

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work with the Alabama Organizing Project and will soon teach courses at Auburn University. Tracy is continuing his studies at Alabama and aims to work with people caught up in the criminal justice system. We wish them the best in their future careers and are grateful we could help educate three future leaders!