



Report

P. O. Box 1188, Montgomery, AL 36101
Street address: 400 South Union St. #340
(800) 832-9060 | www.arisecitizens.org
Facebook & Twitter: @AlabamaArise

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You saved the ACA!

You called, you emailed, you rallied, and you killed the bill! Repeal of the Affordable Care Act failed, thanks to advocates like you. It's a win to celebrate – but there's still work to do. *See Page 5 for more details and more on what comes next.*

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Now you can support Arise when you buy on Amazon! Just go to smile.amazon.com and choose Arise Citizens' Policy Project. For every \$100 you spend, you will raise 50 cents for our research and education on poverty issues. Fifty cents may not seem like a lot, but if 1,000 people spend \$100 each, that adds up to \$500.

It's quick and easy to do. And if everyone pitches in, it could make a big difference!

Upcoming events

Sept. 11, Fairhope – Baldwin County Arise meeting, Fairhope Friends Meeting House, [6 p.m.](#)

Sept. 12, Mobile – Mobile County Arise meeting, Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, [6 p.m.](#)

Members to pick 5 issues for Arise agenda Help choose our 2018 priorities

By *Chris Sanders, communications director*

The room will be packed and full of energy when Arise members gather to pick our 2018 issues at our annual meeting Sept. 16 in Montgomery. (*See details and voting rules at right.*) One new proposal will compete with six current priorities (there was a tie last year!) for five available slots on Arise's issue roster next year. Two issues are permanent priorities: tax reform and adequate state budgets.

Please RSVP by Friday, Sept. 1, by visiting arisecitizens.org or calling us at 334-832-9060. We hope this newsletter will help equip you to choose our 2018 issue priorities next month. Inside, you'll find proponents' summary of their new proposal, as well as our policy staff's overviews of the current issue priorities. We hope to see everyone Sept. 16 as you pick Arise's 2018 agenda and renew our shared commitment to building a better Alabama for all.

Annual meeting: What you need to know

When: Saturday, Sept. 16, 2017, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Registration starts at 9:30 a.m. (*Lunch provided. Please bring \$10 if you can.*) Please RSVP by **Friday, Sept. 1**, at arisecitizens.org or 334-832-9060.

Where: Aldersgate United Methodist Church, 6610 Vaughn Road, Montgomery

Voting rules: *Member groups* get up to 42 votes: up to 6 representatives with 7 votes each. *Individual members* get 5 votes each. (A person can vote as an individual or as a member group's representative, but not both.) Groups must be current on dues to be eligible to vote. Individual members must have given between July 1, 2016, and Aug. 17, 2017, to be eligible to vote.

Reminder: Members must be present for *all seven* issue presentations to vote. No voting dots will be distributed after issue presentations begin, and no votes may be cast until after the final presentation.



More than 250 people poured into our 2016 annual meeting, and we expect another big turnout when Arise members like you gather next month to discuss and vote on our 2018 priorities. Get live updates by liking Alabama Arise on Facebook and following @AlabamaArise on Twitter. Then tell your friends about us so our movement can keep growing!



A few words from Kimble

By Kimble Forrister,
executive director

Will the competition for votes be any less intense if fewer options are in play? No, I'm not talking about the Senate primary. I'm talking about the fact that we have only one new issue proposal this year to compete with six existing Arise priorities. Last year, remember, we had a tie for last place, so we agreed to take on a total of eight issues. (We always work on the two permanent issues, adequate budgets and fair taxes.) I bet we'll see no less drama this year as members choose five of the seven issues up for grabs.

We expect a full house at our annual meeting again this year. As hundreds of our members have learned first-hand, it's a fun day. It's your chance to decide what our strategic priorities should be. If you have five votes to cast, do you place all five dots on one issue or spread them out? Do you prefer bills that can pass in an election year, or do you beat the drum for a long-term policy goal? And which is worse: a state law that hurts a million people a little, or one that hurts a few people deeply?

You get to decide. We've based the Arise movement on the belief that our members' wisdom and passion should set the priorities. That makes annual meeting one of the most inspiring days of the year. In three years, the number of you voting has grown from 129 to 232. Our most active member groups can get more voting clout by bringing a full delegation of six folks. It's starting to feel like a convention!

But let's not forget: What happens back home is what matters most. With your help, we can get more people engaged and truly make headway on a statewide agenda.

With peace,

Proposed new issue priority

Statewide ban on "debtors' prison" practices

By Peter Furst, Greater Birmingham Ministries Economic Justice/Systems Change

The national practice of debtors' prisons was outlawed in 1833 in America. But a handful of states, via city and county governments, still impose harsh fines and then jail folks who cannot pay those fines. Alabama is such a state with locales still carrying out the practices resembling those of debtors' prisons.

Much like payday loans, "debtors' prisons," with their unforgiving harsh court fines and high fees, toss many people into a whirlwind of mounting debt and punishment that jeopardizes their ability to keep their jobs and hold their family together.

Often the punishment is compounded by revoking people's driver's licenses, which further assures their inability to keep a job.

Let's take a look at this picture: We have a once gainfully employed Alabamian who is now unemployed with a mountain of late charges. In Alabama, those fees can accumulate as high as \$2,000 to \$3,000 for an original cracked tail light fine of \$100. At some point, it is a total lose-lose situation for the courts and the citizen.

At what point do we stand up for the least of these and rein in the practice of harsh fees for petty fine-only offenses and the jailing of those who cannot pay? We are proposing a statewide ban on the practice of "debtors' prisons" in Alabama and calling for the lowering of outrageous fines for petty minor crimes like public intoxication, a faulty rear taillight or missing a stop sign while driving. Enough!

How likely is a ban on "debtors' prisons" to become law in Alabama? Texas' Republican-led legislature just passed a new law addressing this issue. Surely in Alabama, our legislature can do the right thing for poor Alabamians.

Overviews of current issue priorities

Ban-the-box policy

The criminal history checkbox on job applications can keep otherwise qualified employees from making it through the hiring process. For people with criminal convictions, this can create employment barriers as they seek to rebuild their lives after paying their debt to society.

A national ban-the-box movement urges a simple but important change to job applications. Removing questions about conviction histories can level the playing field and give all applicants a fair chance to compete for jobs based on qualifications. Many Alabama employers already delay such questions until later in the hiring process, and then weigh factors like how long ago the offense occurred and whether it is relevant to the job.

Roughly 150 cities and counties have ban-the-box policies for jobs with local government. Twenty-nine states, including Georgia, don't initially inquire about conviction histories for state jobs. Nine states bar the question on private-sector applications. And President Obama banned the box for federal jobs by executive order in 2015. Alabama can join this movement by passing a ban-the-box law and giving employers a more complete pool of job applicants from which to choose.

SB 200, sponsored by Sen. Quinton Ross, D-Montgomery, passed the Senate in 2017 but never got a House vote. The bill would have banned the box on all state and local government job applications. Ross has indicated that he plans to introduce it again in 2018.

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Overviews of current Arise issue priorities

Death penalty reform

Alabama's capital punishment system is out of sync with nearly every national trend related to executions. Alabama sentences more people to death per capita than any other state in the nation, and it is the only state with no state-funded program providing legal assistance to death row prisoners.

This year brought a victory for justice, as the Legislature overwhelmingly voted to end judicial override, a policy that allowed judges to sentence capital defendants to death despite a jury's recommendation of life without parole. Alabama was the last state in the country to allow judicial overrides, and Arise had advocated for an end to the policy for many years. Arise also has supported a three-year moratorium on executions and other bills to lower the risk of errors and injustice.

Much work remains to reform the state's capital punishment laws and ensure the integrity of convictions. Alabama has no statewide public defender system, and lethal injection protocols remain shrouded in secrecy. Legislators passed a law in 2017 to accelerate death penalty appeals, and some lawmakers introduced bills that would allow execution by firing squad, electrocution or nitrogen hypoxia.

Housing Trust Fund revenue

For many Alabamians, finding a safe and affordable home is only a dream. Alabama has a shortage of nearly 90,000 affordable rental homes for folks surviving on minimum wage. Alabamians earning minimum wage must work 72 hours a week to afford a market-rate, two-bedroom apartment.

The Alabama Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) is a mechanism to construct, rehabilitate and maintain homes for low-income households. But it needs funding to do that. Our proposed

AHTF funding level would boost the economy by more than \$1 billion while creating and rehabilitating homes for those in need. Advocates are seeking to fund the AHTF by raising the state mortgage record tax from 15 cents to 30 cents for every \$100 of a mortgage.

Minimum wage

Decades of stagnant wages have left many hard-working Alabamians falling behind and struggling to make ends meet. Alabama is one of only five states yet to enact a minimum wage law. An increase in the state minimum wage would strengthen Alabama's economy and help families build a brighter future for their children.

In August 2015, Birmingham became the first Deep South city to increase its minimum wage to \$10.10. Set to begin in March 2016, the measure would have provided a raise to an estimated 42,000 workers. But two weeks prior to implementation, the Legislature pre-empted the ordinance and blocked hundreds of thousands of workers statewide from getting similar raises.

Many states and municipalities have phased in minimum wages over time. Contrary to opponents' warnings, these increases haven't fueled massive unemployment or inflation. In some places, advocates have called for a "living wage" of \$15 or more to help make housing, health care and other necessities more affordable.

Payday/title lending reform

Short-term consumer loans come at an extremely high cost for many Alabama borrowers, especially those who lack access to traditional banks and credit unions. Payday loans are short-term (usually two-week) loans charging annual interest up to 456 percent, while auto title loans charge up to 300 percent a year and carry the risk of repossession of the family vehicle.

These high-cost loans strip wealth from borrowers and hurt the economy in communities across Alabama. Every dollar repaid to a high-cost lender takes \$2 out of the local economy because of bankruptcies and lower consumer spending, a recent study suggests. Furthermore, most religious and moral traditions condemn usury.

Arise is part of a statewide coalition promoting interest rate caps on payday and title loans. With bipartisan bill sponsors and rising public support, these plans have united advocates seeking to rein in the industry in Alabama. As the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's future is in doubt since the election, state policy is even more important now.

Public transportation

Lack of adequate public transportation hinders opportunity, community life and economic growth across Alabama. For many low-income citizens and people with disabilities, the transit gap is a barrier to daily living because they can't get where they need to go in a reasonable amount of time, whether for work, education, medical care, civic and social activities, or even voting.

Each \$1 invested in transit returns \$4 or more, studies have shown. That fuels more jobs and economic growth, and it helps more people get to and keep jobs and enjoy a better quality of life. Alabama leaves millions of dollars on the table each year for failure to draw down the 80 percent federal match on state transportation funding.

A new transit strategy showed promise this year. After a decade of trying to end the constitutional ban on funding public transit with gas taxes, Arise proposed a Public Transportation Trust Fund as a future repository for dedicated revenues. The bill passed in the Senate this year, and it has momentum heading into 2018.

Overviews of permanent Arise issue priorities

Tax reform

Alabama's upside-down tax system requires low- and middle-income households to pay twice the share of income in state and local taxes that the top 1 percent pay. Skewed tax breaks for the wealthiest households starve public services of hundreds of millions of dollars a year and force low-income Alabamians to shoulder more of those services' costs.

Arise has pushed to bring this regressive tax system closer to balance by removing the state sales tax on groceries and replacing the lost revenue by ending the state's federal income tax (FIT) deduction, a tax break that overwhelmingly benefits high-income people. Alabama is one of only four states with no tax break on groceries, meaning our state drives struggling families deeper into poverty by taxing a necessity.

One-time money from the BP oil spill settlement will run out in 2018, and the Legislature must find significant Medicaid funding to get the agency through 2019. Arise has endorsed a cigarette tax and a sugary beverage tax increase to improve Alabamians' health and shore up Medicaid funding in the short term. We also will keep pushing for more progressive taxes as a long-term funding solution.

Adequate state budgets

The Alabama Legislature passed 2018 state budgets that once again fell short of meeting critical public needs and highlighted structural flaws that will continue to hold our state back until lawmakers and voters approve fundamental tax reform.

Medicaid dodged a bullet in the 2018 General Fund (GF) budget. The barebones program that underpins our entire statewide health system squeezed by with so-called level funding, plus the final \$105 million

installment of BP oil spill settlement funds. This money will not be available for the 2019 budget, which means legislators will face a GF shortfall of at least \$100 million when they return to session in January 2018.

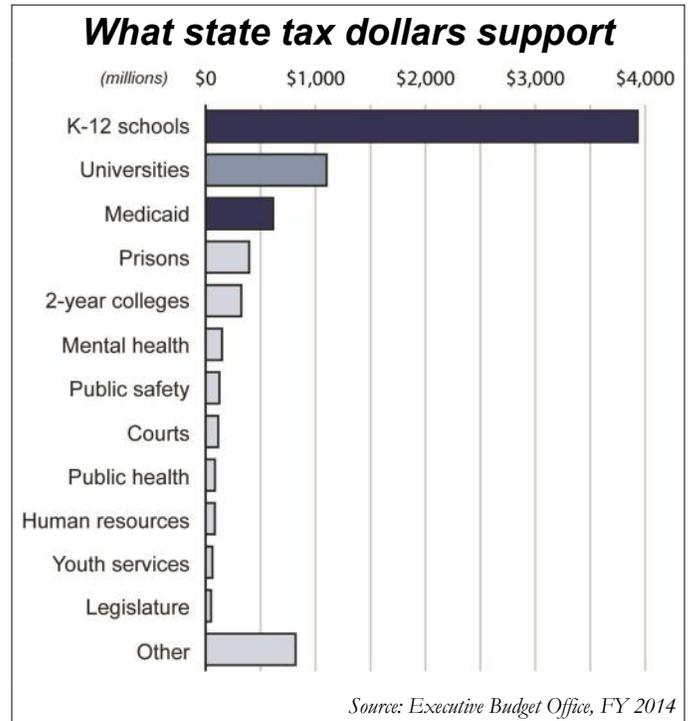
The consequences of Alabama's flawed tax and budget system are clearly visible in 2018's cobbled-together GF budget, especially in the funding cliff facing Medicaid, a program that provides health coverage for more than one in five Alabamians – mostly children, seniors, pregnant women or people with disabilities.

Level funding for other GF services such as mental health, public health and corrections leaves them ill-prepared for lawsuits, outbreaks of illness or other contingencies. And a looming Medicaid shortfall means it is unlikely that those services can expect adequate GF support in 2019.

Alabama is out of step with other states in the extent to which we " earmark" our taxes, designating the purposes for which certain taxes may be spent. Our constitution earmarks most revenue from "growth" taxes like income and sales taxes – which increase when the economy is good – to the Education Trust Fund (ETF).

The GF, meanwhile, is funded through many taxes that don't grow with the economy. The resulting structural deficit means state funding for GF services is unable to keep pace with ordinary growth in enrollment, inflation or population.

The picture was less bleak in the 2018 ETF budget, which will increase K-12 funding and allow for the needed hiring of about 150 new teachers for grades 4-6. It also will boost funding for Alabama's well-regarded, though not universal, pre-kindergarten program. But other services won't get adequate ETF support. For example, though mental health will receive



\$3.5 million more from the ETF, that falls far short of the \$10.5 million increase expected to be needed to settle a lawsuit over mental health services for low-income children.

Legislators will return Jan. 9 for what likely will be a hurry-up session prior to the 2018 elections. Once again, they will face a series of budget headaches – Medicaid, prison construction plans, and corrections and mental health systems facing legal intervention – that cannot be resolved without new revenue. To stop and reverse the steady deterioration caused by year after year of inadequate budgets, Alabama requires a bold move on tax reform that raises adequate revenues for essential state services.

Grassroots pressure prompts U.S. Senate to drop ACA repeal plans **You just helped save the ACA! Here's what comes next**

By Jim Carnes, policy analyst

As political theater, the night of July 28 had it all: a crucial decision in the wee hours, a key player leaving his hospital bed to take the stage, intense public pressure on one side and the power of the presidency on the other. And for the final suspenseful turn, an arm raised in silence as the entire U.S. Senate – and millions of weary TV viewers – watched the deciding vote cast with a literal “thumbs-down.”

The defeat of bills to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was a testament to people power. President Trump and congressional leaders had promised “repeal and replace” on day one of the new administration. But ACA opponents overreached. Repeal may have made useful campaign fodder, but it turned out that details still matter.

While Congress hammered at the ACA, Arise members and other advocates highlighted the life-saving value of ACA coverage, consumer protections, premium subsidies and adequate Medicaid funding. Across the country, people responded. Millions of folks like you sparked a grassroots campaign to save the ACA. You called, you wrote, you marched, you rallied and you camped out to kill the repeal bill.

The Senate vote was a watershed moment. Denied their long-sought policy prize, the congressional majority broached the taboo topic of bipartisan negotiations and hearings before leaving town for the August recess. As ACA defenders celebrate, momentum is in their favor. But momentum alone won't fend off the challenges ahead.

The ACA is still at high risk. As encouraging as bipartisan overtures may be, serious planning is taking place for a renewed repeal effort. One notable plan from Sens. Bill Cassidy, R-La., and Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., would harm



Nicole Watkins of Birmingham talks about the Affordable Care Act's importance to her and tens of millions of other Americans with pre-existing health conditions during a public forum on health care July 15 in Birmingham. Watkins was one of more than a dozen Alabamians who shared personal stories during the event, which Arise co-sponsored.

Why saving the ACA matters so much:

- **24 million keep their coverage.** Repealing the ACA would have unraveled enormous health coverage gains that drove the country's uninsured rate to an all-time low.
- **Kids and seniors avoid health care cuts.** Many repeal bills would have limited federal Medicaid funding, likely forcing deep cuts to a program that covers more than 1 million Alabamians – mostly children, seniors, pregnant women, and people with disabilities.
- **Insurance plans still must cover 10 essential health benefits.** Under full ACA repeal, insurers could have stopped covering vital services like maternity care, mental health care, or emergency or preventive care.

the insurance market and Medicaid at least as much as previous bills. The vigorous advocacy that secured July's win cannot rest with the Cassidy-Graham proposal still on the horizon.

Just as dangerous are administrative decisions that can undermine the ACA. Executive actions could turn calls to “let Obamacare collapse” into a self-fulfilling prophecy. This spring, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced it will cut the next open enrollment period for Marketplace coverage in half, from three months to six weeks. This move likely will mean higher premiums as fewer younger, healthier people enroll.

Reducing outreach is another angle for administrative interference. HHS scaled back enrollment advertising in January, and reports of HHS funding

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A healthy Alabama for all: Scenes from our health forum



The stories were raw and heartfelt when nearly 100 people attended a public forum on health care at First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham on July 15. Many Alabamians told stories of how coverage under the Affordable Care Act allowed them to lead active, productive lives and get treatment for life-threatening emergencies, physical disabilities and mental health issues. Arise co-sponsored the forum along with AIDS Alabama, Alabama Appleseed, the Children's Policy Council of Jefferson County and the Southern Poverty Law Center.



The ACA is saved!

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for anti-ACA videos have raised legal concerns. Most ominous are threats to end payments to insurers that limit out-of-pocket costs for low-income patients. Uncertainty about the payments already has contributed to 2018 premium hikes.

Alabama health advocates have two other “alerts” on their radar. The Sept. 30 deadline to reauthorize federal funding for the State Children’s Health

Insurance Program (SCHIP) will be a top priority. Alabama’s ALL Kids program, which covers children in low- and moderate-income families, was the nation’s first SCHIP and has remained a point of pride. Safeguarding it will take more public outcry. Congress likely will try to lower the federal SCHIP match rate, at a cost of about \$90 million a year to Alabama’s General Fund.

Back home, Gov. Kay Ivey has announced she will end Medicaid’s transition to nonprofit managed care

through regional care organizations (RCOs). The Legislature unanimously passed the law to create RCOs in 2013 but since has hedged on fully funding the transition. A scaled-back RCO plan had been set to launch Oct. 1.

Arise has worked since 2013 to help support consumer oversight of RCOs, along with our partners at the Disabilities Leadership Coalition of Alabama. Whatever comes next, we’re committed to ensuring strong consumer engagement in Alabama Medicaid.