



Report

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January 26, 2018

Arise Legislative Day

Tuesday, Feb. 6

9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

State House Room 200

Montgomery

Pre-register at arisecitizens.org.

Upcoming events

Feb. 12, Fairhope – Baldwin County Arise meeting, Fairhope Friends Meeting House, 6 p.m.

Feb. 20, Mobile – Mobile County Arise meeting, Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, 6 p.m.

The staff corner



By *Brenda Boman*,
development director

Here's another great way to support Arise's work: If you're at least 70 ½ years old and

drawing income from a traditional IRA or another qualifying account, up to \$100,000 of your 2018 Required Minimum Distribution will be tax-free if you give it to charity through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). That applies whether you itemize or take the standard deduction.

The check must be payable directly to the charity (but you can have it sent to you and mail it yourself). If you'd like to make a 2018 donation to Arise through a QCD, make the check payable to Arise Citizens' Policy Project. You'll also need our Employer Identification Number (EIN), which is 63-1186365.

Public transit bill already passed in Senate Legislature begins fast session

By *Chris Sanders*, communications director

"Pass budgets and go home." That's the spirit in the air as Alabama legislators look to make quick work of the 2018 session. Even so, we still see some opportunities.

This year may bring a breakthrough on public transportation. The Senate already has passed a bill to create a state Public Transportation Trust Fund. (*See Page 6.*) We'll also keep building momentum to reform payday lending and reduce the burden of criminal justice debt on families. (*See enclosed fact sheet.*) For the latest news on our issues throughout the session, follow us on Facebook and Twitter and visit arisecitizens.org to sign up for action alerts and the Arise Daily News Digest.

A few bills to watch:

Death penalty reform: HB 233 and SB 103 would impose a three-year moratorium on executions.

Grocery tax: HB 238 would end the state sales tax on groceries.

Housing Trust Fund revenue: HB 273 would fund the state HTF.

Payday/title lending reform: SB 138 would increase the term of all payday loans in Alabama to 30 days.

Public transportation: HB 10 and SB 85 would create a state Public Transportation Trust Fund.

Visit arisecitizens.org and click "Current bills of interest" for updates on these bills and many others.

Say hi to our spring interns!

We're thrilled to see so many new faces around the Arise office lately!

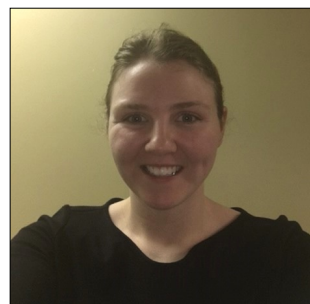
Amy Dennis, Brittany Humphrey and Morgan Rhodes are working with Arise as our interns for the spring 2018 semester. They're helping us monitor the Legislature and providing assistance with our analysis,

outreach and public education efforts. Brittany and Morgan also interned with us last fall, as did Samantha Pullen (a 2017 graduate of the University of Montevallo) and Tanisha Stevenson (a 2017 graduate of Troy University Montgomery).

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Amy Dennis



Brittany Humphrey



Morgan Rhodes



A few words from Kimble

By Kimble Forrister,
executive director

Our landscape has been changing. Since Congress passed the tax bill, we're starting to see ripple effects in state and federal budget debates. Doug Jones was elected U.S. senator, and we hope to influence how he thinks about the safety net. Jones is a big CHIP supporter, and its six-year extension gives Alabama budget writers a sigh of relief. It will be easier to balance the General Fund budget – but we would hasten to add that the GF still suffers because its tax sources are chronically inadequate.

We need to play defense in both Congress and the Legislature. After the huge federal tax cuts for rich people, we expect new attempts to cut eligibility for safety net programs, to impose new work requirements and even to change SNAP and other programs into block grants. Some legislators are arguing that people should be forced to work for sparse benefits. If the maximum cash welfare benefit for a mom with two kids is less than \$50 a week, should she really have a work requirement? If that mom will lose Medicaid by working more than 10 hours a week, why should she be forced to work 20? Sen. Arthur Orr says she can get a Marketplace health plan (but she would have to find a job with wages above the poverty line) and find subsidized child care (but thousands are on the waiting list).

Most of today's lawmakers weren't around for our 1996 welfare reform messages: To move off welfare, people need jobs, transportation and child care. As our member churches said, "We need jobs for those who can work and mercy for those who can't." Some of the hardest-working people are paid the least. Good policies can help them make ends meet.

Yours in peace and hope,

Coverage protected for 170K+ Alabama children CHIP renewed: Good news for kids!

By Jim Carnes, policy director

The parents of more than 85,000 Alabama children with ALL Kids coverage finally received some overdue good news on Jan. 22: Their kids aren't about to lose health insurance. Congress' agreement to renew funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for six years will allow ALL Kids to avoid an enrollment freeze and keep providing life-saving coverage for Alabama children. Nationwide, the renewal will protect coverage for nearly 9 million children whose low- and middle-income families don't qualify for Medicaid.

The renewal will save Alabama tens of millions of dollars. Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), states have been receiving an enhanced federal match for their CHIPs, which in Alabama amounted to full federal funding. In addition to ALL Kids, CHIP pays for Medicaid for 87,000 kids in Alabama. Medicaid coverage for qualifying children can't legally be terminated, so the state would have had to pay more to cover them. Alabama will continue to receive full federal CHIP funding through 2018 and 2019 under the latest renewal.

Families across Alabama deserve to breathe a sigh of relief, but it never should have come to this. CHIP funding was never controversial, and it

deserved a quick, straightforward renewal before it expired nearly four months ago. Delaying the renewal and tying it to other important issues was unnecessary and irresponsible.

An untold story is the stress that Congress' inaction placed on millions of parents across the country who lost the certainty that their children would be able to get the health care they needed. Instead of protecting children's health coverage, leaders in Congress spent month after month trying to undermine the ACA. Then they spent November and December focused on passing a tax bill that disproportionately benefits rich people and large corporations.

CHIP, known as ALL Kids in Alabama, is a proven success story. ALL Kids was the first CHIP plan in the country to win federal approval in the late 1990s. Since then, it has played a big part in cutting the uninsured rate for Alabama children from 20 percent to just 2.4 percent. Other states have seen similar improvements.

Letting CHIP funding expire and remain in doubt for months was an attack on families. Congress should make sure this sad chapter can't be repeated. It's time to fund CHIP permanently and guarantee that all children can receive the health care they need to grow and thrive.

Welcome, interns!

[Continued from Page 1]

Amy Dennis is from Montgomery. She is a senior at the University of Montevallo, where she is pursuing a bachelor's degree in social work. After graduation, Amy hopes to continue her education by obtaining a master's degree in social work.

Brittany Humphrey is an Auburn resident and a Kentucky native. She is a

graduate of Florida International University and a master's of social work student at Arizona State University. Brittany is interested in encouraging policy that is culturally competent and empowering to vulnerable populations.

Morgan Rhodes is a Tennessee native who has lived in Alabama for almost six years. She is a Samford University graduate and is pursuing a master's degree in social work at Samford's College of Health Sciences.

Thank you for your support!

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CHIP renewal removes major stumbling block for General Fund

Key budget issues: Medicaid limits, prison health care

By Jim Carnes, policy director, and
Chris Sanders, communications director

This year could be the calm before an impending budgetary storm in Alabama. Debates over the General Fund (GF) and Education Trust Fund (ETF) budgets for 2019 are likely to be far less contentious than usual. One big factor is that the GF will carry forward \$129 million into 2019, enough to cover most of the requested increases for Medicaid, corrections and mental health care. Congress' decision to continue full federal funding of ALL Kids in 2019 also will save Alabama \$53.6 million that the state would have had to provide to maintain coverage. (See Page 2.)

But another year of delay won't solve Alabama's deeply rooted budgetary problems. The GF receives revenues from a hodgepodge of sources, most of which grow slowly even in good times. That leaves the budget with a long-term structural deficit, meaning revenue growth is not strong enough to keep pace with ordinary cost growth for services like Medicaid, corrections and mental health care. And though ETF funding will be up again next year, state support for education in Alabama still will be below its inflation-adjusted level in 2008, before the Great Recession.

Work requirements, higher copays may loom for Medicaid

Alabama may try to increase copays and impose work requirements for some Medicaid enrollees this year. Those moves would limit access to the health care that many enrollees need to stay in the workforce while doing little to increase employment. Even so, work requirements are gaining traction: A Senate committee on Jan. 24 approved SB 140, sponsored by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, which would require Alabama to seek a federal Medicaid waiver for "the firmest but nonetheless most reasonable work requirements allowed." (See the box at right.)

Arise will seek to minimize the harm from any Medicaid copay or work requirement proposals. Alabama soon will request a federal waiver to impose a work requirement for enrollees in the "Parent and Other Caretaker Relative" category, state Medicaid Commissioner Stephanie Azar said during state budget hearings on Jan. 4. That group includes about 75,000 of the roughly 1 million Alabamians with Medicaid coverage. Caretaker responsibilities, disabilities and other factors preclude many of them from working. On an encouraging note, Azar highlighted the importance of an "exclusion list" of circumstances that would exempt many members of this group from the requirement.

Azar's discussion of higher Medicaid copays was far less robust. She noted that federal law would limit them to no more than 5 percent of a household's annual income. Azar also said it remains unclear whether it would cost the state more to implement such a program than it would raise in return.

Medicaid has good financial news, but it won't last long. The agency has \$53 million to carry forward into 2019 because prescription drug costs were lower than expected. Medicaid received \$701 million from the GF's ongoing revenues last year, plus \$105 million of one-time money from the state's share of the BP oil spill settlement. Medicaid would receive \$755 million from the GF under Gov. Kay Ivey's proposed 2019 budget – 6 percent less than its total GF allocation last year, but 8 percent more than it got out of ongoing revenues.

Medicaid provides health coverage for one in five Alabamians, most of whom are children, seniors, or people with disabilities. About 70 percent of its funding in Alabama is federal. The rest comes from the GF (11 percent) and other state sources like provider taxes on hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacies (19 percent).

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Four reasons to oppose work requirements for Alabama Medicaid:

(1) The vast majority of enrollees are children or otherwise exempt. Medicaid covers about 1 million Alabamians (roughly one in every five people in the state), and most of them are children. Almost all of the rest are seniors, pregnant women, or people with disabilities who would be exempt from work requirements. Only about 7.5 percent of enrollees – roughly 75,000 people in the "parent and other caretaker relative" category – could be subject to a requirement.

(2) Many Alabamians who would face work requirements have serious barriers to employment. Nearly 90 percent of the 75,000 parents and caretakers covered by Alabama Medicaid are women. Many are going to school or caring for young children at home. Medicaid work requirements would not make child care, transportation or job training more accessible for them.

(3) Adults who lose Medicaid would fall into the coverage gap. Most states seeking to impose work requirements have expanded Medicaid for working-age adults. But Alabama hasn't. About 300,000 Alabama adults are caught in a coverage gap. They earn too much for Medicaid but too little to receive subsidies for Marketplace coverage.

(4) Work requirements would create a catch-22 for people in poverty. Alabama parents can't qualify for Medicaid if their income is above 18 percent of the poverty line. Someone working just 20 hours a week at minimum wage earns too much to qualify for Medicaid in Alabama. It's unfair to require people to work to keep health coverage, only to take it away when they do.

Arise staffers hit the streets for the Women's March



Arise staff members and interns were among the hundreds of Alabamians who took part in the Women's March in Montgomery on Jan. 20. It was one of hundreds of similar marches held across the country. Pictured above are policy analyst Carol Gundlach (bottom left); policy director Jim Carnes and his wife, Erin Kellen; executive director Kimble Forrister and his wife, Calli Patterson; and Heather Jones, associate minister at Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Montgomery. Pictured at right are Arise interns Brittany Humphrey and Amy Dennis.

Early success on public transit

By Chris Sanders, communications director

Public transportation in Alabama took a big step forward on Jan. 25 when the Senate voted 26-0 to create a state Public Transportation Trust Fund. SB 85, sponsored by Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, moves to the House. A House committee already approved a similar bill: HB 10, sponsored by Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills.

Alabama is one of five states with no state public transportation funding. As a result, the state leaves tens of millions of dollars of federal matching funds on the table every year. Lack of investment in public transportation makes it harder for thousands of Alabamians to meet basic needs like getting to work or the doctor's office. It also is a barrier to economic development. SB 85 and HB 10 would not provide state public transportation funding, but they would create a landing place for any future appropriations.

State budgets

[Continued from Page 5]

Medicaid reform efforts will continue despite the end of the regional care organization (RCO) initiative in July 2017. Azar discussed an "RCO pivot," which will build on existing care management initiatives known as "health homes." Health homes seek to cut costs and keep patients healthier by using primary care doctors to coordinate enrollees' health care. Alabama Medicaid has operated health homes since three regional pilot projects launched in 2010. Arise is committed to ensuring strong consumer oversight and community engagement in whatever shape the new Medicaid reforms take.

Lawsuit to force investment in mental health care in prisons

Mental health care services in Alabama prisons are "horrendously inadequate," a federal judge ruled last summer. That led to an order for the state to solve the chronic understaffing in its prisons, particularly among corrections officers and mental health professionals. Ivey's budget proposal would provide the Department of

Corrections with an extra \$80 million in GF support over the next two years to help address those issues.

Staffing in Alabama's prison system is at only half of its expected level, Corrections Commissioner Jeff Dunn said on Jan. 4. In some facilities, that number is as low as 30 percent, he said. Sentencing reforms have helped cut the state's prison overcrowding from 190 percent of designed capacity to 160 percent in recent years. But Alabama still has the country's "highest overcrowding percentage," Dunn said.

Education funding up but still lower than a decade ago

Alabama's education funding next year will remain well below its inflation-adjusted level from 2008. The ETF funding cap for 2019 will be \$6.6 billion. That is \$216 million, or 3.4 percent, higher than this year's allocations. The Rolling Reserve Act sets the cap annually based on a moving average of the previous 15 years of ETF revenues. Ivey's proposed ETF and GF budgets would provide cost-of-living raises for both education employees and state employees.