

THE ARISE REPORT

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Help shape Arise's vision for a better Alabama

By Presdelane Harris, organizing director
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Arise again will hold an all-remote annual meeting via Zoom for 2021.

Please mark your calendar for the Alabama Arise annual meeting on Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021. You'll receive more details in the coming weeks about the meeting time, format and voting process.

Member groups that want to make a new recommendation for a 2022 issue priority should submit the proposal online to put the idea before the membership. The form is available on our website at alarise.org/issueproposals. **Proposals for new issue priorities or a strategic change to an existing one must be submitted by July 23, 2021.**

2021 Listening Sessions: Enclosed is a flyer announcing the Arise 2021 listening sessions, our Town Hall Tuesdays, beginning June 15. The town halls are open to everyone! Please email me for more information.

Arise advances justice in a pandemic session

By Chris Sanders, communications director | chris@alarise.org

Advocacy barriers for Alabama Arise members were extraordinarily high during the Legislature's 2021 regular session. The COVID-19 pandemic limited physical access to the State House and made a difficult policy landscape even rockier. (See page 2.)

But Arise members were undeterred. They spoke out forcefully and repeatedly for justice and opportunity. And the result was real, meaningful progress on multiple issue priorities.

This year brought advances on criminal justice reform and internet access. It delivered stronger investment in early education and preserved funding for Medicaid and mental health care. And it saw efforts to chill free speech and erode the Department of Public Health's effectiveness defeated.

Arise members made their presence known throughout the session.

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A new era for Alabama, for Arise and for the nation

By Robyn Hyden, executive director
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During the bleakest days of 2020 (a seemingly unending year), I could not have predicted the tremendous opportunities we would now find ourselves facing. After one of the darkest periods in recent memory – a year of loss, isolation and hardship, when our deepest values and institutions were under attack – I am relieved to reflect now on all the progress made in this momentous spring.

Thanks to a series of ambitious infusions of federal relief funding via the CARES Act, the Rescue Plan and the forthcoming American Families Plan, we are pivoting to play offense once again via our Cover Alabama Coalition and the Hunger Free Alabama campaign. Instead of fighting consistent efforts to defund our social safety net, this year will see the expansion of the Child Tax Credit to cut child poverty rates in half. Together, we will have the opportunity to reduce economic and racial inequities, to feed more families and care for more sick people.

Thanks to your steadfast support, we're fighting for everyday people's survival. Together, we're making progress on all fronts. And yes, I do believe that we will win!

The dark road not taken in the 2021 regular session

By Jim Carnes, policy director | jim@alarise.org

Predicting actions and outcomes of a legislative session is never an easy bet. When the Alabama Legislature opened its 2021 regular session in February, our crystal ball was even cloudier than usual.

Strong currents of anxiety were sweeping the country amid fear and frustration over COVID-19 and precautionary measures, conflicting beliefs about racial justice and law enforcement, and the aftershocks of a bitter presidential election. In state after state, lawmakers proposed harsh reactions to each of these pressures, and Alabama appeared ready to follow suit.

On the pandemic front, governors and public health officials faced new limits on their emergency authority. Basic freedoms of assembly and speech came under threat by officials seeking to prevent protests like those that followed George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer. Dissatisfaction with election results fueled efforts to narrow access to the electoral process, particularly for communities of color.

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Federal relief funds could transform Alabama's future

By Jim Carnes, policy director | jim@alarise.org
and Carol Gundlach, policy analyst | carol@alarise.org

How often have we gotten to say that it's raining money in Alabama? That's the image that comes to mind as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), passed in March, begins to direct more than \$4 billion in new federal funds into the state over the next three years.

The funding could help Alabama make historic progress in public health, education, family well-being and community viability if spent wisely and equitably. It also offers generous incentives that would more than offset the state's initial cost to expand Medicaid. This new COVID-19 relief comes on top of \$1.9 billion Alabama got under the CARES Act last year.

The state government will receive more than \$2 billion under ARPA. Counties will get nearly \$1 billion. Alabama's 21 largest cities will receive more than \$400 million, and other municipalities will get nearly \$400 million as well. Both the

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We're hiring!

Alabama Arise is seeking a full-time **development associate** to steward and grow our individual and group member giving programs. This position reports to development director Amber Haywood. The ideal candidate loves customer service and is enthusiastic, flexible, detail-oriented and focused. Applicants also should be passionate about building a better Alabama for all and value dignity, racial equity, justice and opportunity. Visit alarise.org/about/employment to learn more and apply through **Monday, June 14, 2021**.

Arise members are a force for change in Alabama

By Amber Haywood, development director
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Alabama Arise members are the force behind our fight for the equitable policies that low-income Alabamians deserve. With Arise represented across the state, our lawmakers and legislative officials know that their constituents are knowledgeable, caring individuals willing to hold them accountable. **In short, your membership makes a difference.**

When you join Arise, your contributions fund the policy analysis, advocacy and organizing necessary to move the needle toward justice. And we're winning! During the legislative session, we made strides to increase access to universal broadband. And we defeated bills to limit voting rights, bills to limit protests and bills to limit public health authority. Arise members are truly a force for change!

If you have never joined Arise before, now is the time. Your new gift will be matched 1:1 by a generous supporter, DOUBLING your impact! If you haven't given since July 1, 2020, I hope you will renew today. Your contribution of any amount makes you eligible to vote and choose our legislative priorities for the year.

We can't do this work without you. Please donate today at alarise.org/donate and help us build a better Alabama for all.

ROAD NOT TAKEN

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Harmful bills targeting all of these goals began surfacing when the Legislature convened. And limited public access to the State House only raised the stakes.

But Alabama bucked the trend. Thanks to strong, persistent advocacy from Arise members and our partners, legislation that would have tied the hands of public health officials, rolled back civil liberties and erected more barriers to voting mostly died. We also made some progress on several important Arise priorities this year. (*See page 1.*)

In the Legislature as in life, mistakes avoided are often a big measure of success. Alabama's refusal to follow the reactionary path of neighboring states is a victory to celebrate. Thank you to our members for helping make that happen.

FEDERAL RELIEF

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state and localities may use funds to offset the pandemic's strains on families, small businesses, public health and infrastructure like water and sewer systems and high-speed broadband networks.

Portions of ARPA money are earmarked for direct payments to local school districts. Other funds are dedicated to provide rental assistance and make child care more affordable and accessible. The act also temporarily boosts the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit and temporarily increases food aid under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and WIC. In addition to these supports, ARPA also provides one-time cash payments (\$1,400 each for most Americans) and direct assistance for health care, funeral expenses and other essential needs.

Arise will continue to follow these funding streams with the goal of ensuring equitable distribution and transparency. And we will advocate to make the temporary improvements permanent in the next round of federal relief.

Arise action alerts by the numbers

This year, Arise's dedicated members and supporters consistently reached out to lawmakers when we asked. It's impossible to overstate just how critical it is for our legislators to know what their constituents want. We're so grateful to everyone who sent messages from our action alerts during this session. Here are a few examples of just how many messages you sent to legislators and the governor in response to Arise and Cover Alabama action alerts during the 2021 regular session:



- **Medicaid expansion: 12,442**
- **Voting rights and protecting free speech: 597**
- **Protecting public health: 406**
- **Civil asset forfeiture reform: 266**
- **Other criminal justice reforms: 389**



SESSION RECAP

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They gathered monthly for online Membership Monday events to stay engaged and connect with advocates across Alabama. On May 18, nearly 100 people attended a virtual recap event to debrief the session and prepare for next steps. And throughout the year, our supporters flooded email inboxes and rang phones off the hook, contacting legislators and Gov. Kay Ivey more than 14,000 times. (*See above.*)

That advocacy worked. Lawmakers passed SB 215 by Sen. Del Marsh, R-Anniston, to promote broadband expansion to rural communities and other underserved areas. And legislators finally began to rein in civil asset forfeiture, a practice that allows law enforcement to seize property without a criminal conviction.

SB 210 by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, doesn't end civil asset forfeiture, but it makes some important initial improvements. Those changes include exempting some property from forfeiture and strengthening protections for innocent owners.

SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE AGAINST PUBLIC HEALTH THREATS, ANTI-PROTEST BILL

Arise advocacy helped stop harmful proposals as well. Our members played a key role in blocking a plan to limit the governor and public health officials' ability to respond to emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. After our members sounded the alarm, SB 97 by Sen. Tom Whatley, R-Auburn, lost a House procedural vote in the session's final hours.

Arise members also helped halt a threat to free speech. HB 445 by Rep. Allen Treadaway, R-Morris, would have expanded law enforcement's powers to arrest protesters for "rioting" and imposed harsh mandatory minimum sentences on people convicted under the law. The bill passed in the House but died in the Senate.

The Legislature likely isn't done this year. Lawmakers expect one or more special sessions to address unfinished business like redistricting, prison overcrowding and allocating federal relief funds. (*See page 2.*) Whenever the next session may be, Arise members will be ready, advocating as always for a better, more inclusive Alabama.

ALABAMA 
Arise
TOWN HALL TUESDAYS

We're Listening!



Arise wants to hear from you this summer. You can lift your voice and share your vision for our 2022 policy agenda three ways:

- Register for online summer listening sessions below.
- Contact your area organizer for a virtual meeting.
- Plan an in-person meeting with your organizer. Arise still works remotely, but organizers are available for limited in-person meetings. Arrangements must be made in advance.

June 15th, 6 p.m. - A better Alabama for all

If you could wave a magic wand and fix one issue that addresses poverty in Alabama, what would that issue be? Join this session to discuss the issue you would choose.

June 29th, 6 p.m. - Health care for all

Everyone should have access to the health care they need to live a long and healthy life. Yet thousands in Alabama are caught in a health insurance coverage gap. Join this session to talk about closing that gap by expanding Medicaid in Alabama.

July 13th, 6 p.m. - Justice for all

Voting rights barriers and an unjust criminal justice system have disenfranchised many of our neighbors. Join this session to discuss your priorities for improving access to voting and reforming our criminal justice system.

Arise organizers:

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Debbie@alarise.org (Northeast)
Mike@alarise.org (Southeast)

Registration is required. Sign up here:
ALARISE.ORG/2021TOWNHALLTUESDAYS



The Cover Alabama Coalition is a nonpartisan alliance of more than 110 advocacy groups, businesses, community organizations, consumer groups, health care providers and religious congregations advocating for Alabama to provide quality, affordable health coverage to its residents and implement a sustainable health care system.

EXPANDING MEDICAID WOULD MEAN

Affordable coverage for more than 340,000 Alabamians with low incomes



28,500 new jobs in communities across Alabama



Access to health care for more than 5,000 uninsured veterans



Life-saving care for new mothers



Join us today!



COVERALABAMA.ORG



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