

THE ARISE REPORT

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Alabama Arise's 2023 policy priorities

By Chris Sanders, communications director
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More than 400 Alabama Arise members selected our 2023 legislative agenda after our Annual Meeting on Sept. 24. The seven priorities chosen were:

- Tax reform
- Adequate budgets for human services
- Voting rights
- Criminal justice reform
- Death penalty reform
- Public transportation
- Payday and title lending reform

"Our 2023 policy priorities reflect the need to work together to break down policy barriers that keep people in poverty," Arise executive director Robyn Hyden said. "We must build a healthier, more just and more inclusive future for our state."

See the enclosed flyer for more on our priorities. And email Arise organizing director Presdelane Harris at pres@alarise.org to set up an issue preview event in your area ahead of the Legislature's 2023 regular session.

Arise urges 'Yes' vote on recompiled constitution

By Mike Nicholson, policy analyst | mike@alarise.org

Alabama Arise is committed to recognizing, teaching about and repairing the damage that state lawmakers perpetrated for generations through codifying racism and racist practices. Racist language and the harmful provisions flowing from it have no place in our state's most important legal document.

Alabamians will decide on Nov. 8 whether to remove racist language from the state constitution by adopting a recompiled constitution. Examples of deleted language include references to separate schools for Black and white children and prohibition of interracial marriages. Arise recommends voting "Yes" on the recompilation, which will appear on the ballot as the Constitution of Alabama of 2022.

The changes in the recompilation wouldn't address all of the problems with Alabama's constitution, including harmful limits related to tax policy and local governance. But they still would move Alabama, and our constitution, in the right direction. Arise urges Alabamians to vote "Yes" to help move our state forward.

For more information on the recompilation, see the enclosed fact sheet.

A sincere thank you

By Robyn Hyden, executive director
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As I reflect on our 2022 Annual Meeting and dive into planning for our 2023 agenda, I simply want to say thank you for your generous contributions, advocacy and support.

This July marked the beginning of my fifth year as executive director, and next year will mark 35 years since Alabama Arise was founded. The COVID-19 years have stretched us to adapt in new ways. I couldn't be more grateful for the ways our dynamic staff, supporters and board leaders have navigated these changes as we continue learning, growing and doing new things together.

As we look ahead to fall and winter, we're doubling down on hybrid opportunities to engage members and grassroots constituents. We're looking at how we engage the broadest base possible to achieve our goals. And we're striving to meet the needs and goals identified by you, our members.

Thank you for charting our agenda and joining us to continue our forward momentum. When we push together, change is on the horizon.

Arise helps strengthen fight against cervical cancer

By Whitney Washington, communications associate | whitney@alarise.org

Six Black women from Alabama's Black Belt region assembled in a meeting room at downtown Birmingham's Westin Hotel on Aug. 26-28 for a weekend of intense and insightful advocacy training. The weekend served as this cohort's introduction to both each other and the material they'll be learning. And Alabama Arise had the privilege of being part of the event.

Arise health policy advocate Jennifer Harris will spend the next few months guiding these incredible women through various training sessions through a partnership with the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice (SRBWI) and Human Rights Watch. These women have been tasked with reducing rates of cervical cancer in their communities, and they are up to the challenge.

Why the focus on cervical cancer? Consider these sobering statistics:

- Black women die of cervical cancer at 1.5 times the rate of white women in the United States.

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Child Tax Credit boost cuts child poverty to record low

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

People-friendly policies like the Child Tax Credit (CTC) can and do reduce poverty. The 2021 U.S. Census data released last month delivered eye-opening proof of that fact, revealing a dramatic nationwide reduction in child poverty fueled largely by a temporary CTC expansion.

By itself, the CTC expansion kept 5.3 million Americans above the poverty line, data showed. The one-year improvement, enacted as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), made the full credit available to children living in families with low or no earnings. It increased the maximum credit to \$3,000 per child and \$3,600 per child under age 6. And it extended the credit to 17-year-olds.

CTC expansion helped reduce disparities for Black and Hispanic children. It

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Annual Meeting 2022

Alabama Arise held our first hybrid Annual Meeting on Sept. 24, both in person at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Montgomery and virtually on Zoom. We thank the hundreds of members who joined us across both spaces.

Front page: Members gather at the in-person meeting. Top left: Arise senior policy analyst Carol Gundlach gives an update on budgets and tax reform. Top right: A member asks a clarifying question. Bottom left: Former executive director Kimble Forrister (right) and other members listen to issue presentations. Bottom right: Arise board president Kathy Vincent embraces outgoing board member Roger McCullough. For more pictures from the event, check out the "Annual Meeting 2022" album on our Facebook page. Photos by Arise member Laurel Akin.



Together, our members make a difference!

By Jacob Smith, development director
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There's something about the approaching winter holidays that brings out the generous nature in all of us. We all want to do our part and work together to build community and a better Alabama.

At Arise, we're grateful for your giving. Almost 13% of our financial support comes from members like you. When you give, we have the flexibility needed to focus on you and your priorities. We believe people from every community must be engaged in the state and federal policymaking process to effect real and lasting change.

Will you help us grow our membership? If you haven't already, join or renew your membership with a gift. There are so many ways to give:

- A one-time or monthly gift online at alarise.org.
- A check mailed to P.O. Box 1188, Montgomery, AL 36101.
- A gift of stock.
- A gift from an IRA, 401(k) or other tax-deferred savings account.

Once you've given, invite your friends, family and network to join in making a difference! Or invite a group you're in to join as a member group! Share why you're a part of Arise and how you partner with us.

If you would like more information, please email me at jacob@alarise.org. Thank you for your generosity in this end-of-year season.

CANCER FIGHT

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- In Alabama, Black women die of cervical cancer at nearly twice the rate of white women.
- With the HPV vaccine, cervical cancer is nearly entirely preventable.
- The Black Belt region is especially hard hit due to lack of access to health care.

“Research is clear on the best possible outcomes in ideal situations. But the reality is far from ideal for many women in rural Alabama,” Harris said. “Less access to health care, the need for more preventive education, and barriers such as a lack of transportation increase these health disparities for too many families.

I was lucky to meet these women and work with my colleagues in creating a helpful curriculum for the weekend. Arise executive director Robyn Hyden charged right into advocacy training at the event. Her sessions described the role of advocates, how to talk to legislators and how to get bills passed

The SRBWI conference and the Black Belt cohort training were an incredible opportunity to see some of the often invisible organizing and community-building work happening across Alabama. People long neglected by institutions and lawmakers are finding creative ways to take care of themselves and their communities. And Arise is committed to working alongside them to amplify their voices and lift policy barriers standing in their way.

Read more about this powerful weekend at alarise.org/blog.



Alabama Arise staff members Jennifer Harris, Whitney Washington, Presdelane Harris and Whit Sides (left to right) presented at an advocacy training for Black women from Alabama’s Black Belt region Aug. 26-28 in Birmingham. Arise will continue to assist the women in coming months as they work to reduce cervical cancer rates in their communities.

CHILD TAX CREDIT

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also drove the U.S. child poverty rate to a record low of 5.2% under the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). Unlike the traditional poverty measure, the SPM reflects the poverty-reducing effects of tax credits and non-cash benefits like food assistance.

The CTC expansion expired in 2022 after Congress failed to renew it. But federal lawmakers will have an opportunity to revisit that decision when they return to Washington later this fall.

“The success of the Child Tax Credit expansion was undeniable,” Alabama Arise executive director Robyn Hyden said. “This policy slashed child poverty and helped families make ends meet across our state and our country. Congress needs to renew the Child Tax Credit expansion and make it permanent. And our state lawmakers should do their part to help Alabama families keep food on the table by ending the state grocery tax and replacing the revenue in a responsible way.”



ALABAMA
Arise

2023 Policy Priorities

Our policy roadmap to a better, more inclusive Alabama

Tax Reform



A better tax system can help struggling people make ends meet. Alabama should untax groceries and ensure fair, sustainable funding for vital services.

Adequate State Budgets



Strong public services broaden opportunity for all. Alabama must expand Medicaid, protect funding for public schools and help people facing hunger and hardship.

Voting Rights



Everyone deserves a say in our democracy. Alabama should pass automatic voter registration and lift barriers to voting rights restoration.

Criminal Justice Reform



Our justice system must ensure fairness and equity for all. Alabama should repeal the Habitual Felony Offender Act and reduce punitive fines and fees.

Death Penalty Reform



All Alabamians deserve equal justice under the law. Lawmakers should require juries to be unanimous in any decision to impose a death sentence.

Public Transportation



Community connection is vital. Alabama should fund the Public Transportation Fund so everyone can get to work, school, medical care and more.

Payday and Title Lending Reform



Borrowers in a sea of deep debt need a lifeboat, not an anchor. Alabama should reduce interest rates and strengthen consumer protections on payday and title loans.

Join Arise's movement for change! Visit alarise.org to learn more.

A dire need for reform: How Alabama's constitution is holding our state back

By Mike Nicholson, policy analyst

The 1901 Alabama Constitution is overreaching, poorly written and harmful to many of the people it governs. Its authors intentionally disenfranchised people of color, women and people with low incomes in an effort to silence them politically. The document also created barriers to governance for local elected officials. More than a century later, these barriers still limit opportunities for change at the local level today.

Alabama voters will have the opportunity on Nov. 8, 2022, to adopt a recompiled state constitution. This amendment would authorize changes such as removal of racist language and illegal provisions that have since been repealed. Arise is urging Alabamians to vote "Yes" on the recompile in November. These changes wouldn't address all of the problems with the state constitution. But they would move Alabama, and our constitution, in the right direction.

A shameful start

In his opening remarks, the president of the 1901 constitutional convention declared a major goal was "within the limits imposed by the federal Constitution, to establish white supremacy in this state." The resulting document effectively removed the voting rights of African Americans and poor white people. By concentrating power in the hands of a few special interests, it allowed wealthy landowners to keep their property taxes low at the expense of school funding for low-income children.

Federal courts have overturned most of the discriminatory provisions, but the shameful evidence of this legacy persists in our constitution. This concentration of power remains an obstacle to effective local government. The constitution similarly hinders state officials from modernizing our tax system to serve Alabama's current economic realities. And the document limits lawmakers' ability to change policies that perpetuate the harmful and racist objectives overtly codified in 1901.

The home rule question

In Alabama, counties must seek constitutional amendments to conduct many routine functions of local government, known as home rule. At 977 amendments and counting, the Alabama constitution is 12 times longer than the average state constitution and 40 times longer than the U.S. Constitution. Because many amendments require a statewide vote, and because legislators can override many proposed local actions, the rights and privileges of people in one county are often granted or denied by residents of other counties that would be unaffected by such changes.

One example came in 2015, when legislators from across Alabama blocked Birmingham's attempt to institute a \$10.10 minimum wage. The law effectively prevented cities from setting minimum wages responsive to their local needs – even though Alabama has set no state minimum wage at all. An earlier example came in 2004, when Trussville officials sought to raise local property taxes that fund their public schools. Because of tax-related provisions in the state constitution, the move required statewide approval of a constitutional amendment. The measure won 68% support from Trussville voters, but 55% of Alabama voters rejected the amendment. People living hundreds of miles away from Trussville thus helped prevent the city from improving funding for its local schools.

Both instances demonstrate state lawmakers' carefully preserved ability to undermine the autonomy and political authority of local communities. Those restrictions are especially egregious when a mostly white Legislature limits the authority of Black local officials.

Our antiquated tax system

The 1901 constitution perpetuates a tax structure that favors wealthy people, overtaxes people with low incomes and fails to provide adequate funding for vital services. The state property tax rate, for example, has not increased since the constitution was written. The document requires a voter referendum to raise local property taxes to support schools. Amendments in the 1970s restricted the assessment of taxable property value, which further limited funding for public schools. And for decades, the now-illegal poll tax ensured only prosperous white voters had a decisive voice in elections.

Some prosperous districts in Alabama spend more than twice as much per pupil as high-poverty districts. Because our state and average local property tax rates are among the nation's lowest, our education system is one of the most poorly funded. When a 1933 amendment established the state income tax, it was designed to affect only the wealthiest residents. But because income brackets for these rates have changed very little in 75 years, most Alabamians now pay at the top rate. As a result, Alabama's income tax is among the highest in the nation for families at the poverty line. Similarly, those with the highest incomes no longer pay a fair share. Writing tax policies into the constitution made these policies difficult to modernize in response to inflation and changing needs.

The sales tax is perhaps the most regressive tax. It takes nearly eight times the share of income for the state's lowest earners as for its wealthiest families. Sales taxes rise and fall with the economy, like income taxes but unlike property taxes. As a result, our state education budget, which relies heavily on income and sales taxes, is at risk of sharp cuts when the economy slows.

Barriers to meeting Alabama's basic needs

The constitution limits Alabama's ability to provide needed services for struggling families. For example, a 1952 amendment prohibits use of state gas tax revenue for public transportation. As a result, inadequate transportation keeps thousands of Alabamians from meeting basic needs, such as getting to work, going to the doctor or traveling to the grocery store. Every year, Alabama frustratingly leaves millions of federal matching dollars on the table because we can't put up the state share.

Our antiquated tax system places a straitjacket on state funding for other vital services, too, such as health care and child care. Most states earmark, or set aside for use, a little more than 20% of their tax revenues. But Alabama earmarks more than 80% of our revenues. That leaves the governor and the Legislature little flexibility to match available resources to pressing needs. Alabamians suffer when earmarking impedes an opportunity to maximize federal matching funds or increase health coverage.

Advocates for a new Alabama constitution have been divided for decades over how to best achieve their goals. Some want to hold a convention at which elected delegates would craft a new constitution all at once, subject to voter approval. Others have favored a gradual, article-by-article rewrite. Lawmakers have taken the latter approach in recent years, revising several articles but avoiding meaningful changes to tax policy or home rule.

A step forward: the recompiled state constitution

Efforts to modernize and improve the state constitution continue despite the challenges. In 2020, Alabama voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment authorizing the Legislative Services Agency to clean up and consolidate the constitution and remove explicitly racist content and illegal provisions that have since been repealed. Examples of deleted racist language include references to separate schools for Black and white children and prohibition of interracial marriages. The Legislature approved the proposed revisions in the 2022 regular session without a dissenting vote.

On Nov. 8, 2022, Alabamians will vote on whether to authorize those changes by adopting the recompiled state constitution. Arise recommends voting "Yes" on the recompile, which will appear on the ballot as the Constitution of Alabama of 2022.

Alabama Arise urges a 'Yes' vote on the recompiled state constitution

Alabama Arise is committed to recognizing, teaching about and repairing the damage that state lawmakers perpetrated for generations through codifying racism and racist practices. Racist language and the harmful provisions flowing from it have no place in our state's most important legal document. That is why we urge Alabamians to vote "Yes" on the recompiled state constitution on Nov. 8, 2022.



The recompilation will appear on the 2022 general election ballot as the Constitution of Alabama of 2022. Here is the full text that voters will see:

"Shall the following Recompilation of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 be ratified?"

PROPOSED CONSTITUTION TO APPEAR ON THE BALLOT STATEWIDE

CONSTITUTION OF ALABAMA OF 2022

Proposing adoption of the Constitution of Alabama of 2022, which is a recompilation of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, prepared in accordance with Amendment 951, arranging the constitution in proper articles, parts, and sections, removing racist language, deleting duplicated and repealed provisions, consolidating provisions regarding economic development, arranging all local amendments by county of application, and making no other changes. (Proposed by Act 2022-111)

- YES
 NO