

# THE ARISE REPORT

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## Federal Medicaid, SNAP threats imperil Alabamians

By Chris Sanders, communications director | [chris@alarise.org](mailto:chris@alarise.org)

Lawmakers should not hurt people who are struggling to help people who are already doing well. But Congress is considering cuts to health coverage, food assistance and other human services that would do exactly that. These proposals would increase hunger and hardship for hundreds of thousands of Alabamians.

The U.S. House last month approved a budget resolution that could set the stage for more than \$1 trillion of cuts to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) over the next decade. Congressional leaders are weighing these cuts to offset the cost of renewing huge tax breaks for wealthy people. Among those breaks are higher estate tax exemptions and a cut to the top marginal income tax rate.

The contrast is stark. The amount of potential Medicaid and SNAP cuts in the House resolution would be roughly equal to the cost of extending tax breaks for just the wealthiest 1% of households, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) found.

These funding cuts would increase suffering across Alabama. As many as 1 in 5 Alabamians enrolled in Medicaid could lose coverage due to cuts or work reporting requirements, CBPP estimated. Many other people could see SNAP assistance reduced or eliminated. Other potential targets include school meals, student loan assistance and tax credits for health coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

*Continued on page 5*

## Arise Legislative Day is Thursday, March 20!

By Matt Okarmus, communications associate | [matt@alarise.org](mailto:matt@alarise.org)

Your voice matters! Make plans now to speak up with us for a better Alabama for all.

Join us at Arise's 2025 Legislative Day on Thursday, March 20, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the State House in Montgomery.

Legislative Day is an annual opportunity for Arise members and friends to meet their lawmakers and make the case for policy changes to improve the lives of everyday Alabamians.

Arise staff will announce the policy focus of Legislative Day closer to the date. In the meantime, check inside this newsletter for more on what we're working on at the State House this year. (*See page 2.*) And subscribe to our email list for updates throughout the session.

Visit [alarise.org/2025legislativeday](http://alarise.org/2025legislativeday) or see the enclosed flyer for more information. We look forward to seeing you there!

‘Look for the helpers.  
You will always find  
people who are helping.’

By Robyn Hyden, executive director |  
robyn@alarise.org

Mr. Rogers said his mother told him the quote above when things he saw on the news frightened him.

We are in scary times, to say the least. Congress is advancing a billionaires-first budget that could gut Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, TANF, public health and school meals. Our president is pushing the boundaries of executive authority and challenging the rule of law. Billionaires are vilifying people who access public benefits and calling the core functions of government into question.

Immigrant, Black and LGBTQ friends and neighbors are being pushed into the shadows as they are attacked and harassed. Some are seeing their competence or their very right to exist in our country or in their workplaces questioned.

But our history is not entirely written yet. The outcomes will be determined by those who show up, speak out, march in the streets and dissent.

When I look around and see all the Arise members and allies standing together to speak out, I see the helpers. Thank you for standing with us to help hold the line for our democracy and for an inclusive, fair and free society.

# Maternal health, paid leave are early highlights in 2025 legislative session

By Carol Gundlach, senior policy analyst | carol@alarise.org

Alabama Arise is advocating successfully to advance several good bills early in the Legislature’s 2025 regular session. Our members are speaking out and getting results on maternal health care access, paid parental leave and other important issues.

The session began Feb. 4 and likely will end in mid-May. Here is an overview of Arise’s advocacy at the State House this year.

## MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH CARE

Both the House and Senate have voted overwhelmingly for legislation to improve Medicaid access for pregnant women. HB 89 by Rep. Marilyn Lands, D-Huntsville, and SB 102 by Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, D-Birmingham, would use a process known as presumptive eligibility to streamline Medicaid enrollment for eligible women, allowing them to get health care earlier in their pregnancies.

We also have seen early momentum for bipartisan bills to ensure paid parental leave for teachers and state employees. HB 327 by Rep. Ginny Shavers, R-Leesburg, and SB 199 by Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, would provide eight weeks of paid leave for mothers and two weeks for fathers.

The leave would apply to childbirth, adoption or miscarriage. Gov. Kay Ivey prioritized this policy in her State of the State address, and Arise strongly supports it.

Arise also supports bills to allow nursing mothers an exemption from jury duty and to improve Medicaid coverage for mothers facing postpartum depression. We back legislation to allow some women convicted of crimes to serve supervised probation during and immediately after pregnancy. And we support requiring employers to allow breaks for nursing mothers to express breast milk.

## ADEQUATE STATE BUDGETS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Medicaid expansion would help make health coverage affordable for all Alabamians, and it remains a top Arise budget priority. (*See page 3.*) We also oppose legislation to authorize junk health plans that could deny coverage for people with preexisting conditions. And we oppose federal efforts to slash

*Continued on page 6*

# Advocating to Cover Alabama

By Debbie Smith, Cover Alabama campaign director | [debbie@alarise.org](mailto:debbie@alarise.org)

Alabama Arise and Cover Alabama joined with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network to host a Medicaid Expansion Advocacy Day on Feb. 25 in Montgomery. Nearly 100 passionate supporters came to the State House to speak out in defense of Medicaid and the urgent need to close Alabama’s health coverage gap.

As federal threats to Medicaid persist, advocates stressed that expansion is essential both to cover more people and to protect against harmful cuts. Faith leaders, business owners and individuals living in the coverage gap shared powerful personal stories. Many described the devastation of losing Medicaid coverage and falling into the gap – earning too much to qualify for traditional Medicaid but too little to receive tax credits for private coverage.

These testimonies highlighted the urgent need for expansion to ensure everyone has access to care. Thank you to everyone who showed up, spoke out and made a difference. Your voices matter, and we are making progress together.



Above: Camden resident Kiana George and Birmingham resident Angelica McCain pose for a photo. Both women told their stories of life in Alabama’s coverage gap during a Feb. 25 news conference. Cover: Arise’s Debbie Smith urges lawmakers to expand Medicaid. (Photos by *Whit Sides*)

## Congratulations, Adam!

Arise’s Adam Keller accepted a new position last month as our worker power campaign director. In this role, he will grow coalitions among organized labor and the community to empower workers organizing for positive change from the workplace to the State House.

Adam still will be our organizing team contact in northeast Alabama during a brief transition period. We hope to hire and announce two new organizers soon. Visit [alarise.org/employment](http://alarise.org/employment) for more on any future job opportunities.



## Make the most of your membership

By Jacob Smith, advancement and operations director | [jacob@alarise.org](mailto:jacob@alarise.org)

At Alabama Arise, we work to engage everyday people on policies that impact people with low incomes. Our collective voice is stronger together!

We’re in the middle of Alabama’s legislative session, which means your support is fueling our work at a critical time. Will you help us build momentum? Here are a few ideas:

- Visit [alarise.org/donate](http://alarise.org/donate) to make a monthly or one-time gift.
- Share our social media posts and action alert emails with your friends and family.
- Join us at Arise Legislative Day in Montgomery on March 20.

As a member, you are a part of our network of more than 150 organizations and 1,500 individuals. You also can access benefits such as:

- The Daily News Digest, which compiles relevant news and opinions about Arise’s priorities.
- Weekly legislative updates during the session so that you always know what’s happening in Montgomery and how you can help.
- The opportunity to work directly with our staff to advocate for the causes you care about most.

If you have any questions, reach out to me at [jacob@alarise.org](mailto:jacob@alarise.org). Thank you for joining Arise in our work!

# STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## McKenzie Burton wants to get a cup of coffee with you

By Whitney Washington, communications associate | [whitney@alarise.org](mailto:whitney@alarise.org)



Alabama Arise's supporters and members are used to seeing a handful of friendly faces from the staff regularly. They may see organizers speaking at listening sessions or policy analysts giving TV interviews.

But many other staff members are also integral to realizing Arise's mission. One is someone whose name you may recognize, but not her face: McKenzie Burton, an Arise development associate since October 2021.

McKenzie's journey to Arise started after graduating from the University of Georgia and serving as a youth minister and outreach coordinator for an Episcopal Church in New York.

"I loved the work, and doing direct service work made me realize that what I really wanted was to help solve the root of the problems I was seeing," she said.

After stints working for political campaigns, McKenzie found herself drawn to policy work.

"Electing the right people is important, but we must hold our officials accountable to doing the right thing once they are in office," she said. "I feel lucky to have found a home in this journey at Alabama Arise. Arise is doing some of the toughest policy work in one of the toughest states, making our quest all the more crucial for everyday people."

### 'I LEARN EVERY DAY FROM OUR MEMBERS'

As a development associate, McKenzie works to recruit and nurture Arise members. She leads fundraising campaigns, membership drives and more. After working directly with Arise members for more than three years, she's learned quite a bit from them.

"This work is hard, and I learn every day from our members what it looks like to stay focused and persistent in a way that is sustainable for yourself and the organization long-term. I also admire the dedication to collective organizing," she said.

*Continued on page 5*

## SPOTLIGHT

*Continued from page 4*

McKenzie said she loves engaging with members, and encourages them to reach out directly to her.

“Getting to know our members and helping to connect them to the pieces of the work they care most about is my favorite part of my job,” she said. “Reach out to grab a cup of coffee with me!”

### ‘A GIRL CAN DREAM’

Arise’s work is difficult, but McKenzie has high hopes for the future.

“I would love to see us begin to really stretch our wings and reach people in the state that we haven’t been able to reach before and build a truly diverse and reflective membership base,” she said. “My goal in this work is always to work myself out of a job! Maybe in 30 years, we will have built a truly responsive, just state with policies that set us all up for success. A girl can dream.”

McKenzie has accomplished a lot in her time as development associate. But one of her proudest moments came outside that role, when she participated in the creation of Alabama Arise Workers United.

“I was really proud to have helped organize our staff union, and even prouder to be working for an organization that has voluntarily recognized our union and been supportive of a democratic workplace,” she said.

McKenzie said she balances the trying work of advocacy with intentional self-care.

“I try to not take work home. Leave emotional space for true decompression and connection with my friends and family, whether that’s over a movie, at a restaurant, or visiting out-of-town friends in their cities,” she said. “Nothing makes me feel more connected to myself and the world than quality time with my people.”

For those curious about how to support McKenzie and Arise’s work, she said it’s simple: Keep us growing.

“Continue to support the work, and bring your friends and family along with you,” she said. “I am only one person, and our staff is only 20 people. The more we grow our individual donations, the more we can focus on the work our members care most about, and the stronger our coalition’s voice is at the State House.”

## FEDERAL BUDGET

*Continued from page 1*

“Our lawmakers should reject harmful service cuts for working people and tax giveaways to wealthy households,” Alabama Arise executive director Robyn Hyden said. “They should focus instead on building an economy that works for everyone in Alabama and across our country.”

The proposed cuts are not a done deal. The House and Senate still must agree on an identical budget resolution. After that, lawmakers would have to identify specific cuts to meet the resolution’s numerical targets. Then the House and Senate would have to pass budget legislation to enact those cuts.

Arise and our partners have spoken out repeatedly against these harmful proposals. We joined 55 other groups in January to urge Alabama’s congressional delegation to reject additional tax breaks for wealthy households. The joint letter asked Congress to provide tax reductions for working families instead by expanding the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit. Arise also joined 111 groups in February in another letter urging Alabama’s delegation to reject cuts to Medicaid and SNAP.

Read both letters at [alarise.org/january2025letter](http://alarise.org/january2025letter) and [alarise.org/february2025letter](http://alarise.org/february2025letter).

Arise and our members will continue opposing service cuts that would hurt families who struggle to make ends meet. As we wrote to Congress in January: “Americans want you to meet the moment and put the future and well-being of all of us ahead of tax cuts for the wealthy and well-connected.”

## 2025 SESSION

*Continued from page 2*

Medicaid and food assistance to fund tax breaks for wealthy households. (See page 1.)

Arise is advocating for state funding to allow all public schools to provide universal free breakfast to every student if they choose. We are seeking to ensure ongoing support for Summer EBT benefits for more than 500,000 Alabama children, which our members' advocacy secured last year. And we are working with other advocates to reform Alabama's school funding formula, ensuring equitable public education for all students.

Arise was instrumental in creating state trust funds for public transportation and affordable housing. We are working with legislators on multiple possibilities to support these services.

### REFORMING ALABAMA'S UPSIDE-DOWN TAX SYSTEM

Alabama reduced its state sales tax on groceries from 4% to 3% in 2023. Reducing the grocery tax further and ultimately eliminating it remains an important Arise goal. This may require amending the original legislation to phase in the next reduction sooner.

Arise supports good bills to end the state sales tax on infant formula, diapers and women's hygiene needs. And we are closely monitoring the CHOOSE Act's impact on education funding. Arise opposed the 2024 law, which will divert at least \$100 million annually away from public schools and toward private schools and homeschooling.

### VOTING RIGHTS, CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND DEATH PENALTY REFORM

Voting is a fundamental way for people to make their voices heard. Arise opposes efforts to make it harder for people to exercise their right to vote. We support legislation to allow early voting, reduce barriers to



Arise worker policy advocate Dev Wakeley testifies Feb. 6 against HB 29, a bill that would make it harder for workers to claim unemployment insurance benefits. (Photo by Robyn Hyden)

absentee voting, and remove barriers to voting rights restoration for disenfranchised Alabamians.

Reforming criminal justice policies, including the death penalty, has been an Arise priority for many years. We are working to pass legislation improving the state's broken parole system. We also back efforts to apply Alabama's ban on judicial overrides of jury sentencing decisions in capital cases retroactively.

### WORKERS' RIGHTS AND RACIAL JUSTICE

Arise is committed to supporting safe workplaces and workers' rights to organize. We support legislation allowing Alabama to recapture tax incentives from companies that violate child labor laws. We also support a bill to end state restrictions on local minimum wage increases. And we oppose legislation making it harder for people to receive unemployment insurance benefits after they lose their job.

The 2024 federal election has influenced state legislative priorities. Numerous state bills are targeting people without immigration documents and attacking efforts to advance racial equity and inclusion.

Arise stands with our partners and friends in opposition to harmful bills in these areas.



# LEGISLATIVE DAY

## Thursday, March 20, 2025

**9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

Alabama State House - Room 200  
11 South Union Street, Montgomery  
(State House faces the rear entrance of the Capitol Building)



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### Your voice matters!

Make plans to attend and speak up for a better Alabama for all!

### Legislative Day participants will:

- Learn crucial information about Arise's legislative priorities.
- Meet with legislators about improving the lives of everyday Alabamians.
- Participate in a news conference to help amplify our message.

Registration starts at 9:30 a.m. and the event begins at 10 a.m.  
There is no cost to attend, but a \$15 donation for lunch is suggested.

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**Registration is required because seating is limited.**

Learn more at [alarise.org/2025legislativeday](https://alarise.org/2025legislativeday).