

THE ARISE REPORT

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Join us this summer!

By Presdelane Harris, organizing director
pres@alarise.org

Listening is both a value and a process. It is foundational to Alabama Arise's approach to shaping and advancing policies that matter most to those marginalized by poverty.

Arise depends on what we hear to help guide our work toward a better Alabama, and we want to hear from you this summer.

Watch your email inbox for info on summer listening sessions happening across the state. And please contact your regional organizer if you're interested in setting up a virtual or in-person session!

NEW ISSUE SELECTION PROCESS THIS YEAR

One of the items to discuss this summer will be Arise's new issue selection process. We will ask members to adopt seven broad issue categories for the next four years (2026-29).

That vote will occur at this year's Annual Meeting on Sept. 27. (See page 3 for more on our new issue selection process.)

Grocery tax, paid leave, maternal health highlight triumphant 2025 session for Alabama Arise

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

Alabama Arise just wrapped up one of the most successful legislative sessions in our history this year. Life will be better for people across the state as a result – and members like you made it all possible.

Arise members' advocacy and support pushed legislators to enact numerous laws to reduce hunger and promote healthier families. By the time the Legislature's 2025 regular session ended May 14, our members were celebrating many important, far-reaching victories.

- Alabama will reduce its state grocery tax and end the state sales tax on many items for infants and new parents.
- The state will guarantee paid parental leave for teachers, two-year college workers and state employees.

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A big ugly bill for billionaires

By Robyn Hyden, executive director
robyn@alarise.org

The budget legislation that the U.S. House advanced before Memorial Day (the “Big, Beautiful Bill... for Billionaires”) is awful. It would undo progress we have made together over many decades of work.

The good news: The original legislation put forth was even worse. Your advocacy, calls and public actions helped block some terrible policies from moving forward.

More good news: This bill still faces opposition in the Senate, and we have the chance to stall or significantly reduce these harmful cuts. Our actions during June could make a difference in the future of our country for decades to come.

We will provide more ways you can engage in conversations about what these cuts could mean for you and your community over the coming month, as we expect the Senate to vote on this bill by July 4.

By standing together, we can help protect economic security for all Alabamians and future generations.

Federal funding cuts would increase hunger and hardship across Alabama

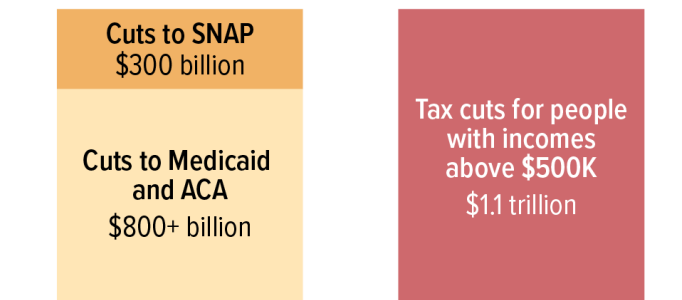
By Carol Gundlach, senior policy analyst | carol@alarise.org

Congress is advancing a cruel proposal to take away food assistance, health coverage and other vital services from millions of Americans who struggle to afford basic needs.

Why? To give huge tax cuts to the wealthiest people in the country. The bill’s proposed \$1.1 trillion of cuts to food assistance and health care over the next decade would be equal to the amount of tax cuts it would provide for the wealthiest 2% of households, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

House Republican Bill Would Take Health Care and Food Assistance Away from People to Pay for Tax Cuts for Wealthy

Bill would cut health coverage by at least \$800 billion and likely much more, and SNAP by nearly \$300 billion, while giving the wealthy \$1.1 trillion in tax cuts



Note: ACA (Affordable Care Act). All estimates are through 2034. Households with incomes over \$500K make up 2% of total households in 2027.

Source: CBPP calculations using JCT tables JCX-22-25R and JCX-23-25 and Congressional Budget Office cost estimate of the House reconciliation bill (May 20, 2025).

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

Congressional leaders are pushing the bill through budget reconciliation, a process that bypasses the Senate filibuster and allows legislation to pass with a simple majority vote. That process is ongoing and fluid. The U.S. House voted 215-214 for the bill in late May. By the time you read this, the Senate may have made many changes, some for the better and others for the worse.

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A new issue selection process, still listening

By Presdelane Harris, organizing director | pres@alarise.org

From our founding, Alabama Arise has been strongly committed to member leadership. Directly impacted communities, our member groups and individuals guide and decide our policy agenda.

Over the years, the way we select this agenda has changed as our work has evolved and as times change. Now we are proposing another change.

The Arise board voted to adjust the way we select our legislative agenda starting this year. We will ask you, our members, to approve this new format at our Annual Meeting on Sept. 27.

WHAT WILL CHANGE

We will ask members to adopt seven broad issue categories for the next four years (2026-29). Arise's bylaws empower members to adopt multi-year priorities, and the first two categories are already permanent issues for Arise.

The seven broad issue categories are (1) adequate state budgets, (2) tax reform, (3) health equity, (4) hunger relief, (5) inclusive democracy, (6) justice reform and (7) worker power.

These seven broad issue categories reflect two things. They summarize the specific issues that members have chosen consistently over the last three years. And they reflect the areas where staff capacity and funding resources have been focused in recent years.

The new process will allow members the opportunity to provide input and rank specific legislative proposals under each category. This ranking will be similar to last year's voting when, for the first time, members ranked multiple bills under the current priorities.

WHAT WILL STAY THE SAME

Member groups still can propose priority legislation under each category to be considered for inclusion in our agenda. And we still will ask member groups to present board-approved proposals to the membership at the Annual Meeting.

Member groups can propose priority legislation that does not fit one of the categories or propose an additional category of work during the next four years. Such proposals will be flagged as "provisional issues" as we assess our capacity

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Subscribe to help build our movement!

By Jacob Smith, advancement and operations director | jacob@alarise.org

If you're like me, you probably have a few monthly subscriptions. You can pay \$15 to watch your favorite TV shows or \$17 to stream your favorite music. There are also some wacky subscriptions like a regular delivery of socks, coffee beans or pet toys!

We thank you for giving to Alabama Arise, too. You just helped us wrap another successful legislative session.

And our work continues: This summer, we'll be all over the state connecting with people like you!

Will you also "subscribe" to Arise to build a more inclusive Alabama with a monthly gift?

Knowing we can depend on your recurring gift will help us plan for the long term and work every day on the goals that members like you set. Of course, we'll keep you updated on your gift's impact through things like this very newsletter.

If you already give monthly, thank you. If you're ready to start, visit alarise.org/donate. Be sure to check the box that says "make my gift recurring." We also have information about monthly bank transfers.

Thank you again for your continued partnership. If you have any questions, please email me at jacob@alarise.org. I would love to hear from you!

FEDERAL CUTS

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The specifics may change, but the bill's brutal core will remain the same. It will increase suffering for millions of Americans with low incomes to finance tax breaks for wealthy households and highly profitable corporations.

AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO SNAP IN ALABAMA

Alabama likely would feel the worst effects from proposed cuts to food assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP helps more than 42 million people nationwide and nearly 800,000 Alabamians put food on the table.

Now, Congress and the White House are threatening those families' meals in an effort to reduce taxes for billionaires. Three major proposed SNAP changes would have devastating effects on Alabama.

(1) The bill likely would require Alabama to pay hundreds of millions of dollars more for SNAP benefits and administrative costs. The federal government has funded 100% of SNAP benefits for decades. Under the new cost shift, Alabama would become responsible for a projected \$258 million or more in direct benefit costs annually, plus an additional \$35 million a year in administrative costs.

The General Fund is already facing increasing costs and often stagnant revenues. There is real reason to be concerned that the Legislature can't,

or wouldn't, commit this money. In that case, Alabama would be forced to cut SNAP benefits significantly – or even eliminate the program altogether.

(2) Congress also is considering expanding SNAP current time limits and work verification red tape for an additional 165,000 Alabamians, including parents with children over age 7. A change of this magnitude would create additional burdens for Alabama's already stretched child care and child welfare systems. And it could leave thousands of Alabama children and families without food.

(3) Congress is considering limiting future growth in the value of SNAP benefits. Over time, this would reduce benefits for nearly 800,000 SNAP participants in Alabama, including more than 300,000 children, even as food costs continue to grow.

THE ECONOMIC DEVASTATION OF SNAP CUTS

SNAP cuts not only would hurt Alabama's people. They also would damage Alabama's economy.

More than 5,000 Alabama stores are authorized to accept SNAP payments, and for many, it's a large part of their business. This is particularly true in small towns and rural communities where retail is a major source of jobs and tax revenue.

Every \$1 in SNAP benefits can generate \$1.50 in economic activity in local

communities, the USDA estimates. Deep SNAP cuts could force layoffs or closures at grocery stores and other retailers across our state. A reduction or loss of SNAP benefits is a threat to our economy and the local communities where we all live and shop.

THREATS TO MEDICAID AND ACA COVERAGE

The bill also would make health care inaccessible or less affordable for tens of millions of Americans, including tens of thousands of Alabamians. It would allow enhanced Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies to expire, increasing premium costs for marketplace plans.

In addition, the bill would create new barriers that would limit Alabama's ability to manage its own Medicaid program in the future.

For example, the legislation would eliminate the federal incentives set aside to help states like Alabama cover the first two years of Medicaid expansion.

Alabama is one of 10 states yet to expand Medicaid to cover adults with low incomes. As a result, nearly 200,000 Alabamians are in the health coverage gap, earning too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to afford private insurance.

The bill also would freeze provider taxes at current levels. This effectively would ban Alabama from increasing fees on nursing homes, ambulance providers

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Welcome, Bernadette and Tamela!



We are thrilled to welcome two new staff members to our organizing team!

Bernadette Allen joined Alabama Arise in May 2025 as the southwest Alabama organizer. She is a Mobile native who graduated from Murphy High School and continued her studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, La. She completed her B.A. degree in behavioral science at Columbia College in Columbia, S.C., and her M.S. degree in human services at Walden University in Minneapolis, Minn.

Bernadette is very active in the Mobile community. She is a member of the Mobile Branch of the NAACP, the League of Women Voters, and the Connection and Social Action Committee in the Delta Theta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., where she served as the coordinator in 2024. She also is the volunteer chairman on the executive board for Stand Up Mobile, a nonpartisan voter education and advocacy organization.

Tamela Glover joined Alabama Arise in May 2025 as a north Alabama organizer. She is a Selma native and proud Alabama A&M University graduate. Her story is rooted in the legacy of those who marched, fought and sacrificed for freedom. Growing up, she heard stories of Bloody Sunday from those who lived it. Those stories planted the seeds of service and were watered by her parents, who have spent more than 30 years in ministry. In 2020, the unjust murder of George Floyd stirred what had always been inside of her, the belief to “do good, seek justice.”

Tam brings passion, strategy and faith to the fight for a more just Alabama. She is pursuing an MPA degree in law and policy and is committed to helping shape systems that truly serve everyone, especially those who were historically disengaged. A proud wife and mama of three, Tam is doing this work with her babies in mind, determined to help build a world in which the next generation can thrive.



FEDERAL CUTS

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and others – even if legislators find that move necessary to fund Medicaid sustainably or expand coverage later.

NOW IS THE TIME TO SPEAK OUT

It is not too late for us, as Alabamians and Alabama Arise members, to raise our voices against this dreadful bill. Congress is hearing the opposition from people back home, and that pressure continues to grow. The bill’s margin for passage is tight, and only a few votes can make a difference.

Please call your U.S. representative and senators to say “no” to deep cuts to food assistance and health care.

Ask them to focus instead on legislation that advances tax justice and meets essential health and nutrition needs in our state and our communities.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Meet Matt Okarmus, our comms multitasker

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



Since 2018, Matt Okarmus has served as a communications associate at Alabama Arise, working on everything from action alerts and fact sheets to editing the weekly legislative recap videos. Like many other staff, Matt did not begin his career in advocacy.

After graduating from Auburn University with a journalism degree, he spent eight years in the newspaper industry, working at the *Montgomery Advertiser* and the *Opelika-Auburn News*.

Eventually, though, Matt felt the need to look for a change. He consulted his wife, a longtime nonprofit professional.

"My wife had spent years in nonprofit work, and it felt like it would be more

rewarding and fulfilling to pursue that path," he said.

But Matt still has a soft spot for his former career.

"Knowing [journalism] wasn't for me makes me have even more respect for all those who are involved in providing the news," he said.

As a communications associate, Matt assists with media response and ensuring Arise's communications team stays connected with our policy and organizing teams.

He also serves on the Communications Advisory Committee for the State Priorities Partnership (SPP). Arise was a founding member of SPP, a nationwide network of more than 40 groups advocating for state policies to reduce poverty.

One of Matt's biggest responsibilities is designing the newsletter you're reading right now (both the print and digital versions).

"I genuinely like looking at the puzzle-piece shifting of getting items to fit and pack them nice and neat and in a way that anyone who's reading it doesn't find it hard to do so," he said about

assembling the newsletter.

"I feel proud when I see something I've worked on out in public and people are looking at it," he said. "Sometimes in comms work, we feel a bit siloed to our computers, and once we're done with one project, another one immediately comes along."

'THE FIGHT CONTINUES'

When asked to describe this year's legislative session in three words, Matt responded simply: "The fight continues." And to prepare for that fight, he makes sure to find ways to care for himself.

"That mindset was really solidified after my daughter was born. If I'm not taking care of myself, I'm not doing my best job of taking care of her," he said.

"She can really bring me back to Earth sometimes. If I'm talking about policy issues too much, I can go to her and talk about Disney princesses and *Paw Patrol* characters instead."

In Matt's seven years at Arise, he has seen a lot of changes. Most recently, the staff union ratified its first contract.

"I was intimidated at first, because I

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Members support tax justice, child nutrition during Arise Legislative Day



More than 200 Alabama Arise supporters packed the State House in Montgomery for our 2025 Legislative Day on March 20. Attendees urged their lawmakers to reduce the state grocery tax and expand access to no-cost school breakfast in public schools. Above: Arise staff, members and supporters gather to stand as one during the news conference. Left: Arise board member Kelvin Mastin leaves a note for his lawmaker. (Photos by Julie Bennett)

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

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had only seen negative things about unions in movies and TV shows," he said. "But everyone – not just from the union side but from Arise as well – has been incredible about working together and finding common ground."

Whether through editing and publishing fact sheets or recording video at Arise events, Matt has been able to connect

with and learn from Arise's members, who have provided valuable insight.

"I was humbled quickly about how knowledgeable and passionate our members are," he said. "My biggest lesson has been to really lean in to what members are saying and realize a lot of them have been fighting the good fight for years."

Matt encourages members to continue to engage with Arise, in any way they can.

"Show up to an event!" he said. "It doesn't have to be in person. We've transitioned to having a lot of virtual sessions, so there are plenty of places to interact with the Arise staff and fellow supporters."

ISSUE PROCESS

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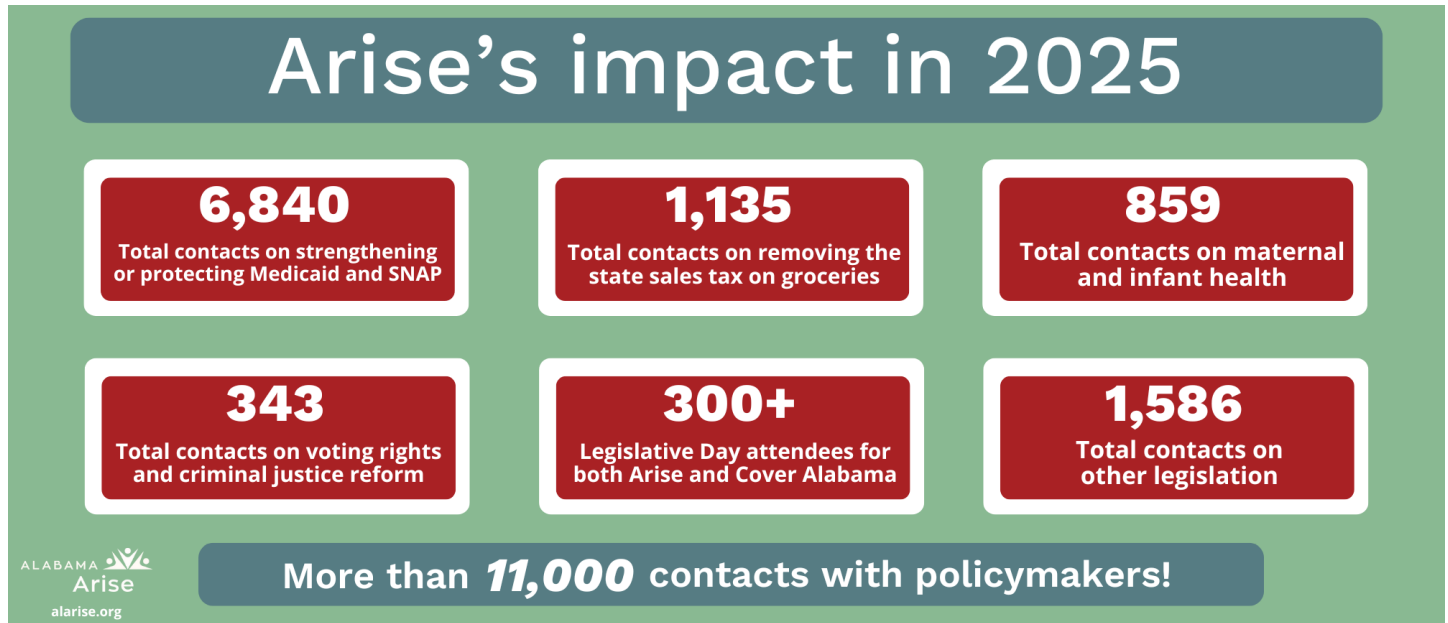
and strategic approach more broadly.

Arise staff will evaluate how the category may fit in with our other areas of work. Then staff will report back to membership about whether we think we can strategically undertake a new broad issue area.

Our organizing team will continue conducting summer listening sessions to get input from members and communities directly impacted by poverty. Please reach out to your regional organizer or me with questions or to set up a virtual or in-person listening session!

SESSION OVERVIEW

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- A new law will remove barriers to Medicaid coverage for many expectant mothers.
- Alabama will invest more in efforts to improve child nutrition.

Arise got results in a big way in 2025. Now the work continues. Congress is considering deep federal cuts and harsh barriers to food assistance and health coverage. (See page 2.) State lawmakers also enacted some harmful bills this year and will seek to advance others in 2026. Through it all, Arise members will keep speaking out for policies to improve life for Alabamians marginalized by poverty.

MAJOR VICTORIES FOR TAX JUSTICE IN ALABAMA

For the second time in three years, Alabama is reducing its state sales tax

on groceries. **HB 386** by Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville, will reduce the tax from 3% to 2% starting Sept. 1. It also gives cities and counties more flexibility to reduce local grocery taxes.

The law built on the momentum of a 2023 grocery tax reduction, and it passed the House and Senate unanimously. Energy for this change was high all year: More than 200 people packed the State House in Montgomery to urge lawmakers to untax groceries during Arise’s annual Legislative Day on March 20. (See page 7.)

HB 386 will help families keep food on the table and is an important step toward tax justice in Alabama. The grocery tax drives many Alabamians deeper into poverty and contributes heavily to our state tax system’s regressive, upside-down nature. Arise

will keep advocating to end the grocery tax in a sustainable way that protects funding for public schools.

Another law to help new and growing families make ends meet is **HB 152** by Rep. Neil Rafferty, D-Birmingham. This law will remove the state sales tax on numerous items for infants and parents, including baby formula, diapers, maternity clothing and menstrual hygiene products. The exemptions start Sept. 1 and will expire on Aug. 31, 2028, unless renewed.

NEW POLICIES FOR HEALTHIER FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Arise also advocated successfully for other pro-family, pro-worker legislation. **SB 199** by Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, will ensure paid parental leave for public school

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SESSION OVERVIEW

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teachers, two-year college workers and state employees starting July 1. The law will provide eight weeks of paid leave to mothers after childbirth, adoption of a child aged 3 or younger, stillbirth or miscarriage. Fathers will receive two weeks of paid leave in those circumstances.

SB 102 by Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, D-Birmingham, is another step forward for maternal health in Alabama. The law, effective Oct. 1, will expand presumptive eligibility, allowing doctors and other health care providers to determine Medicaid eligibility for expectant mothers who likely qualify. This will permit thousands of women to receive prenatal care earlier in their pregnancy.

Arise advocacy also helped increase Alabama's child nutrition investments. **SB 112** and **SB 113** by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, allocated \$17.3 million to expand school breakfast and continue Summer EBT. Arise members last year successfully pushed for Alabama to participate in Summer EBT starting in 2025. The program will help reduce food insecurity for more than 500,000 children statewide.

One setback this year was enactment of **HB 477** by Rep. David Faulkner, R-Mountain Brook. This law authorizes unregulated health plans that could cap benefits for enrollees and charge higher premiums or deny coverage based on preexisting conditions. Arise sought amendments to help mitigate

the law's worst provisions.

THE WORK CONTINUES

Several Arise-backed bills made major progress but fell just one step short of going to the governor. Garrett's **HB 389** would have reduced state income taxes for households with low and middle incomes. Coleman-Madison's **SB 153** would have improved Alabama's voting rights restoration process. And **SB 22** by Sen. Merika Coleman, D-Pleasant Grove, would have allowed the state to remove tax incentives for companies that violate child labor laws.

Arise also helped prevent numerous bad bills from passing. These included proposed new barriers to unemployment insurance benefits, food assistance and Medicaid coverage. *(See the enclosure for one example.)*

With your support, Arise will keep advocating for essential policy changes in 2026 and beyond. We will keep working to close the health coverage gap and untax groceries forever. And we will continue strengthening our movement for a better, more inclusive Alabama for all.

Arise at signings for paid leave, maternal health laws



Alabama Arise staff proudly participated in two bill signing ceremonies with Gov. Kay Ivey on May 1 at the State Capitol in Montgomery. Above: Arise's Jennifer Harris and Robyn Hyden (fifth and seventh from right) celebrate SB 102, which will expand health care access for thousands of expectant mothers. (Photo by Matt Okarmus) Front page: Arise's Hyden and Dev Wakeley (fifth and sixth from right) celebrate SB 199, which will ensure paid parental leave for educators and state employees. (Photo courtesy of Office of the Governor)

Arise staff union, leadership celebrate ratification of new contract

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

Alabama Arise Workers United (AAWU), Arise’s staff union represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA), unanimously ratified its first contract in May.

This was an exciting development after nearly a year of bargaining negotiations between CWA and Arise leadership. The process began after Arise leadership voluntarily recognized AAWU in 2024.

This contract locks in many benefits that Arise already provided staff. It also includes some powerful enhancements to those benefits. These include pay raises, 20 weeks of paid parental leave and an increase in paid time off.

Arise leadership has built an incredible organization beloved by members and staff alike. This contract protects so much of what is already great about Arise for the future.

What does this mean for you, an Arise member? It means our staff can stay healthy and protected as we fight for those same rights for other Alabamians. It also makes us better advocates, because many of us now have a stronger understanding of the labor movement. As Arise continues to support efforts to build worker power, it’s essential to support organized labor.

We also hope this news encourages more of our members to consider what

unionizing their workplaces could look like. Unions are one of the most effective ways to build power for regular workers – which is most of us.

Arise may not be the typical workplace that comes to mind when you think of organized labor, but let that be an inspiration. Starting a union doesn’t mean you hate your job or your boss. It just means you want more of a voice in your workplace.

Union members ratified our contract unanimously, and we have received nothing but support from Arise leadership. This agreement is just Arise’s next step in continuing to advocate for working people.



Representatives from both Alabama Arise and Alabama Arise Workers United were on hand to sign the collective bargaining agreement at the Arise office in Montgomery on May 19. Arise executive director Robyn Hyden is joined by Communications Workers of Alabama 3908 president Luther Land at the table. Above are AAWU steward Juliette Thornton and Arise staff members Jacob Smith, Presdelane Harris and Malee Galloway. (Photo by Bernadette Allen)

HB 177: A case study in Arise advocacy

Alabama Arise successfully leaped into action this year to defend health coverage for thousands of children. In February 2025, Rep. Ben Robbins, R-Sylacauga, introduced **HB 177**, which would have required that children covered by Medicaid be placed on a non-custodial parent's employer-provided health insurance when available, regardless of whether the parent could afford it. The bill also would have **required Alabama Medicaid to sue parents** who did not do so for payments made on the child's behalf. Arise went into action.



Policy analysis: Looking for the devil in the details

After reading HB 177, Arise senior policy analyst Carol Gundlach and other staff got to work on assessing its repercussions. As written, HB 177 would have:

- Required Alabama Medicaid to sue many parents.
- Put many parents who were already struggling into medical debt.
- Forced some victims of domestic violence into contact with their abusers.

Lawmakers turn to Arise for answers

On Feb. 19, the House Ways and Means General Fund Committee debated HB 177. Arise's Robyn Hyden spoke in opposition.

"One example ... is a friend [whose] take-home pay is \$600 a week. ... So she could opt in to pay for health insurance through her employer, [but] it would take more than one-third of her paycheck," she said.

Many committee members raised questions about the bill's potential harms. Acting committee chair Rep. Chris Blackshear, R-Phenix City, urged the sponsor to collaborate with Arise regarding our concerns.

Our members take action

At Cover Alabama's advocacy day, Irondale resident Angelica McCain – equipped and encouraged by Arise – shared her story of being a single mother in the health coverage gap. Later that day, she spoke directly to Robbins to explain how HB 177 would harm her family. In all, nearly 100 of our advocates visited their lawmakers that day.

Harm mitigation: Advocating for amendments

Arise continued speaking with legislators about HB 177. Robbins ultimately proposed a substitute version that removed some of the bill's most harmful impacts. The substitute added an affordability test and clarified that the insurance requirements would not apply to custodial parents.

A quiet but mighty win

Sometimes a legislative win is obvious: A good bill is enacted into law. Other times, it looks more like stopping a bad bill or mitigating the harm it would cause. In the case of HB 177, Arise identified a bill that would have hurt vulnerable Alabamians. Then we successfully advocated to make it less harmful – and ultimately, the bill died.



This is just one example of the kind of critical legislative victories that Arise regularly secures for families across Alabama. Your advocacy and support of our work makes it all possible!



"There are so many people that benefit from Medicaid who don't fit the stereotype. We live in rural Alabama, and we live in cities. We're white, Black, it doesn't matter. They're people like me, just trying to do our best for our kids."

– Angelica McCain

ALABAMA Arise

U.S. House budget bill would hammer struggling Alabama families



Help save SNAP and Medicaid!

- Sign up for action alerts at alarise.org.
- Join Cover Alabama (coveralabama.org) and Hunger Free Alabama (hungerfreealabama.org).
- Share your story with our storyteller Whit Sides at whit@alarise.org.
- Invite your friends and family to join Arise!