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**2020 UWNYS Policy Positions and Budget Requests**

**Background**

The mission of United Way of New York State (UWNYS) is to strengthen the capacity of our local United Ways to be leaders in achieving results that improve the lives of all New Yorkers. Working in communities across the state, local United Ways bring communities together to understand problems, fashion solutions, and raise resources to execute those solutions.

The policy positions presented by UWNYS are based upon the experiences of our local United Ways. They see the needs in their communities, the gaps in service and the programs that are effective in helping people. The local United Ways are active participants in our policy process and our positions reflect their local knowledge.

While every community’s situation is unique, there are commonalities that stretch across all communities and every local United Way encounters them in their work. The role of UWNYS, in supporting the network of local United Ways, is particularly focused on these statewide matters whether they are problems that occur in every community, solutions that require systemic action or issues that require statewide advocacy. Our policy positions address these statewide and systemic issues. Below are outlined the major statewide system and policy issues.

United Ways across the state work to address critical community needs and support the building blocks for good quality of life for all: health, education, and financial stability. During 2018 United Ways Across New York State:

* Raised $162 million in charitable dollars, grants and other sources for special initiatives and community grants primarily focused on access to health, childhood success, youth success and/or economic mobility.
* Supported 130,000+ children achieve developmental milestones, obtain literacy support, or enroll in high-quality child care.
* 50,000 individuals engaged in job skills training or other programs designed to increase their disposable income by accessing benefits and/or lowering their costs
* Successfully advocated for the permanence of the federal VITA program.
* Leveraged over $48 million in federal tax returns to individuals/families through VITA and/or MyFreeTaxes.
* 400,000 individuals gained access to health care or participated in physical activity and/or healthy food access/nutrition programs

*Source: 2019 Global Results Data, United Way Worldwide*

United Way of New York State (UWNYS) has engaged in a number of exciting initiatives that, in conjunction with the work in local communities, provides a basis for our 2020 Public Policy & State Budget Priorities. Priority requests include:

* $1.5 million investment in the state budget to maintain and expand 2-1-1.
* $500,000 set aside for Disaster Activation of 2-1-1.
* Expanding and strengthening New York’s and United States' working family tax credits
  + Expand the Empire State Child Credit and Federal Child Credit to cover children under 4
  + Increase from 30% to 40% federal credit paid to families under the NY EITC
  + Double the amount of child care expenses creditable under the NY CDCTC
  + Expand state and federal EITC to include workers aged 21-24.
* Increasing access to high-quality, affordable child care.
* Establish a state and federal Universal Charitable Tax Deduction.

**Statewide Context/Issues**

***ALICE; a better understanding of need and options***

Local United Ways are leaders in understanding community challenges and seeking information to help to understand those problems. Our goal is to help families and individuals achieve and maintain independence. We know that challenges around employment, housing, food security, child care and transportation are the most critical in most communities.

To better understand these challenges and to bring consistency to the approach, the state United Way network and UWNYS undertook a statewide study in 2016 of people living below a defined survival level. It includes people below the federal poverty level, but also looks at those who are working and whose salaries do not provide sufficient income for them to pay for the basic necessities of housing, food, child care, health care and transportation. We term this group ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed).

The ALICE Report indicates, among many findings, that 44% of New York households are below the ALICE survival threshold, or the income level that will pay for necessities. The Report provides key context for our approach to policy. Programs and services should assist the families and individuals struggling below the ALICE threshold.

***2-1-1; access to services***

Another key example is 2-1-1 – that easy-to-remember, three-digit number - which addresses the need of every consumer to have a simple path of entry into a complex human service system. UWNYS and its affiliate, 2-1-1 New York, Inc., manage this statewide information and referral system and seek state support for 2-1-1 to complement the investment of local United Ways and local government.

2-1-1 is available to every New Yorker, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The 2-1-1 system not only is a service to consumers, but it also provides current data on the services that New Yorkers are seeking. 2-1-1 Counts data can be viewed on a statewide, county or community level. Further, the 2-1-1 data bases of services, with over 69,000 programs in almost 30,000 public and private agencies, is our most complete listing of services in the community.

***Anti-poverty; ESPRI and United Way leadership***

The Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) is a major state program in 16 cities aimed at reducing poverty. Developed in Rochester under the leadership of the United Way, the model engages the whole community, is committed to using best available data, consults people who are or have been in poverty, employs proven service methods, and commits to measuring results.

The program is under the auspices of the local mayor or senior elected official, but each site has selected a nonprofit to fill the coordinating role. In nine of the 16 communities, the local United Way has been chosen to lead the project. This underscores the trust in United Way as a trusted local convener and thought leader with the capacity to deliver change.

***United Way; a leader and advocate for community solutions***

The ALICE project, 2-1-1, and ESPRI are notable examples of United Way of New York State’s role in helping and leading communities to find solutions to complex local problems. The notion of communities working collaboratively to define problems, develop responses and raise resources to implement those responses, is and always has been central to United Way’s purpose.

The need to engage whole communities to tackle problems is more urgent than ever. People too often falter in the gaps between programs and agencies. Large government programs and departments and the resources and expertise they bring are essential but helping families and individuals to achieve success requires a sharing of information, resources and strategies that must occur at the local level.

This is the perspective on which our policy positions and proposals rest. Building the right services around the people who need them offers the best chance for success. United Way is a champion for this approach and is committed to in the many communities which we serve.

Partnership with United Way Worldwide’s Public Policy Team is tantamount to the successful engagement of New York’s federal elected leaders and ultimately in the passing of federal legislation that improves the lives of all Americans. United Way of New York State will engage in efforts that align with stated state priorities: Working Family Tax Credits, Universal Charitable Deduction.

**2020 Policy Priorities**

In 2020 our top policy priorities will be:

1. 2-1-1 Funding; Access to Health and Human Services
2. ESPRI Program; Economic Security (VITA, EITC, CTC)
3. School Readiness and Success
4. Charitable Sector Issues: Universal Charitable Tax Deduction

The materials below provide the framework for the 2020 budget and advocacy positions. The specifics of the proposals as well as the United Way response will be added after the Governor has given his State of the State message and delivered his Executive Budget Proposal to the Legislature.

1. **2-1-1**

Request $1.5 million:

* to maintain current level of services (24/7/365) and provides seasonal resources for additional staffing needs during the tax season
* to continuously improve points of access to 2-1-1 services: web traffic continues to grow faster than call volume. Contact centers note significant usage by other providers. We need to be sure this access point is as robust and efficient as possible. 2-1-1 regions are also adding text-based services (text, chat and email) to better serve individual seeking help.

As a state organization, through this investment 2-1-1 NY will be taking steps to better collect, manage and analyze web data.

* To provide outreach and public awareness.

Advocacy points:

* 2-1-1 is the gateway that connects those needing assistance to essential health and human service (providing information about basic needs, income supports, job training, services for displaced workers, child care, early developmental screening, early learning opportunities, literacy, etc.).
* Thanks to ongoing Legislative support, 2-1-1 is now available statewide, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Six years of Legislative investment totaling $7,487,950 has leveraged $13,139,660 in local support (United Way, local governments, grants, contracts, etc.) as noted in the table below.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Total Budget** | **State Investment** | **United Way Support** | **Other Grants & Contracts** |
| 2014/15 | 3,380,379 | 1,237,950 | 1,091,939 | 1,050,490 |
| 2015/16 | 4,194,832 | 1,250,000 | 1,036,489 | 1,908,343 |
| 2016/17 | 4,853,409 | 1,250,000 | 1,258,247 | 2,345,162 |
| 2017/18 | 4,701,005 | 1,250,000 | 1,299,349 | 2,151,656 |
| 2018/19 | 5,594,170 | 1,250,000 | 1,289,745 | 3,054,425 |
| 2019/20 | 5,148,911 | 1,250,000 | 1,269,327 | 2,629,584 |
| **Totals** | **$27,872,706** | **$7,487,950** | **$7,245,096** | **$13,139,660** |

* Data bases of services across the state include information on more than 29,000 agencies and organizations that provide 69,000 programs and services– information on these can be accessed by phone and on the web
* Highlight usage – call volume, web usage, DD Info Link, VITA, local, special projects.
  + 2-1-1 contacts continue to increase: In 2018, 2-1-1 reported 2.7 million contacts:  1.8 million calls (the most in the country), 897,625 million web visits (exclusive of NYC) and just under 9,000 text-based contacts.   Texting is increasingly available through the system in NYS.
  + 2-1-1 is an important partner during a disaster, providing both information and referral as well as collecting real-time data on unmet needs. July 1 flooding in the greater Utica area prompted 560 calls to 2-1-1 from those affected, freeing 911 responders for emergencies. Halloween floods resulted in just under 600 damage reports made through 2-1-1, allowing partner providers to leverage resources for those affected households.
  + DD Info Link – access point to data bases of services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
  + Used locally to support foster care recruitment, transportation, health insurance enrollment, veterans’ services, volunteer income tax assistance
* 2-1-1 helps ALICE.
* There are numerous emerging opportunities in the health arena, for which 2-1-1 could be considered an immediately available resource for information and referral.

Request $500,000 and include 2-1-1 in NYS’s Emergency Plan:

* To strengthen 2-1-1’s infrastructure specifically for disaster response and enhance the system’s capacity to respond.

Request $55,000 for the purposes of implementing statewide texting, including opioid.

1. **Economic Security: ESPRI, ALICE, Working Family Tax Credits**

**ESPRI;** Build upon lessons learned as the need to address the underlying issues that inhibit family stability and economic mobility

* Recommend funds beyond the initial investment to target this multi-generation, systemic community issue. (amount to be determined by ESPRI Group)
* We recognize that non-ESPRI areas have needs, as well and therefore should not be excluded from state funding opportunities.
* Others as may emerge from coalition work and the identification of policy and regulatory changes that may help

Advocacy points: Focus on what needs to be in place and strengthened in order to improve the economic well-being of New York’s poorest residents

* Many ESPRI communities are making extensive use of ALICE data to isolate and identify both challenges and opportunities
* Income supports – adequate investment in basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, heating assistance, etc.).
* Education and training – focus on what the local job market needs and how to align resources to provide the training needed to fill those jobs (should be a part of the region’s economic development plan), as well as basic literacy.
* 2-1-1 as a means for information and referral to needed services identified through the community planning processes.
* Explore option of joining efforts around benefits cliff.
* Support: Increase access to high-quality, affordable child care. It is critical that working families have access to high quality, affordable childcare. While a number of ESPRI regions are looking at this in more detail, UWNYS continues to advocate for increasing access and affordability of childcare, as well as expansions of important tax credits previously mentioned.
* Support: Continue to provide educational supports for school aged youth. Programs that support early learning, ensure grade-level reading and encourage college and career readiness are critical to breaking the generational cycle of poverty.

**ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed**

In 2016, UWNYS commissioned a report that studied the number of employed individuals and families across the State who were above the poverty level, but still struggled to make ends meet - a population that the report refers to as “ALICE” (Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). In 2018, UWNYS released an updated ALICE Report that shows New Yorkers still face financial hardship despite increases in employment and median income. ALICE is the single mother who needs assistance with child care. ALICE is the father who is facing eviction. ALICE is the veteran who is facing legal problems as a result of active duty or having difficulty re-assimilating into the community. An updated report is scheduled for release in 2020.

The updated report shows that over the last few years, the economy has rebounded and the state has made investments to assist those living in poverty. However, there is still a large number of New Yorkers, **3.2 million, or 45% of the overall population**, that cannot afford the basic needs and lack sufficient income and resources to pay for housing, food, child care, transportation, and health care. The report continues to show that ALICE lives in every part of the state, from our biggest cities to our most rural areas.

Other key findings from the report include:

* In order to meet the ALICE threshold for survival, a 4-person household (2 adults, 1 infant, 1 preschooler), needs an annual income of **$68,808 or $34.40 per hour**. An individual needs an annual income of **$23,148 or $11.57 per hour**. This is 7% higher for single and 9% higher for the 4-person household compared to the report in 2016.
* 51% of all jobs in NYS pay less than $20/hour or $40,000 annually for full-time work. Even working multiple jobs often does not provide sufficient income to meet the ALICE threshold.
* All but one of New York’s 62 counties has 30% or more households earning less than what is needed to afford a basic household budget.

Advocacy points: Focus on what needs to be in place and strengthened in order to improve the economic well-being of New York’s working residents

**State Level Request: Expanding and strengthening New York’s working family tax credits**. Specifically,

* Expand the state’s child tax credit (Empire State Child Credit) to cover children under age four and double the credit for young children.
* Expand and strengthen the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit by increasing the percentage of the federal credit paid to families from 30% to 40%; and expanding the credit for young adults without children (under age 25) who are currently ineligible for either the federal or state credit.
* Double the amount of child care expenses creditable under the state’s Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) to better reflect the true cost of care and enable more middle-income families to afford high-quality child care.

**Federal Level Request: Expand and strengthen the federal EITC and Child Tax Credits**.

* Expand the federal child tax credit to cover children under age four.
* Expand and strengthen the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit by expanding the credit for young adults without children (under age 25) who are currently ineligible for either the federal or state credit.
* Expand VITA funding for communities (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance)

**State Level Request: Increase workforce development, including training programs and access to jobs with higher wages.** While NYS has taken a great first step by increasing the minimum wage, NYS can help those working to gain the skills needed to prepare them for higher paying jobs, in industries that are in demand across the state. By preparing individuals for these types of jobs, NYS can continue to move the needle and ensure that individuals are able to obtain the financial support they need to afford the basic cost of living while further enhancing our economy.

1. **School readiness and success**

Given the very strong early childhood advocacy community, UWNYS should be a participant in those efforts and a leader in marshalling local UW participation in advocacy. United Way and 2-1-1 can also be leaders in marshalling community support and providing needed information and referral.

A significant part of school readiness relates to maternal and child health and wellness. United Way and 2-1-1 can be partners and assets to existing efforts like the First 1000 Days, DSRIP and Value-Based Payments. Their strengths in community and stakeholder engagement, partnerships across a broad array of interests and ability to connect individuals and providers to needed services are United Way and 2-1-1 assets that should be maximized.

The ALICE report particularly notes the implications of poverty on school success, finding that children of color and low-income children preformed lower on test scores throughout k – 12, and had lower high school graduation rates.

Advocacy points; key elements of UWNYS’ school readiness/success priority will include:

* Healthy birth outcomes and healthy start in life – promote adequate investment in prenatal care and outreach, access to well child care, on time immunization, early screening for health conditions and developmental delays, adequate nutrition
* Increase investment in home visiting that will promote positive parenting and reduce child maltreatment
* Investments that will insure that children’s home and early learning environments are lead-free
* Improved pre-k access – may need a mix of investment and regulatory changes
* Investments in adequate and affordable childcare – particular emphasis on children most at risk of entering school behind and parents for whom the child care subsidy may be the difference between maintaining a job or becoming reliant on public assistance
* Maintaining the gains realized through strategic early childhood investments by investing in those services that support school success
* Support for 2-1-1 as an access point to the services noted above. It should also be noted that 2-1-1 is a partner to Help Me Grow in three communities in NYS.

1. **Charitable Sector Issues**

United Way of NYS will continue to monitor and comment on budget and policy proposals that impact (positively or negatively) the non-profit sector. Information, positions and action alerts will be developed and distributed as needed.

In partnership with the United Way Worldwide Public Policy Team, United Way of New York State will lead efforts in New York State and federally on a Universal Charitable Deduction.