

2025 Policy Agenda

VOICES for Alabama's Children's vision is that all children are safe, healthy, educated, and economically secure so that they, their families, and our state can thrive. We believe all children deserve to live in a community that affirms their inherent value as members of the human family. We will advocate for policies that promote dignity, equity and justice, resulting in opportunities that give Alabama children the best chance to succeed.

2025 Policy Priorities:

HEALTH

- ❖ **Expand Medicaid to Make Healthcare Coverage Affordable for All Alabamians.**
Expanding Medicaid can help low-income working Alabamians afford healthcare coverage, keep rural hospitals open to provide critical mental and maternal healthcare and support thousands of new jobs in local communities. As one of only 10 states without Medicaid expansion, nearly 200,000 working Alabamians cannot afford healthcare coverage and more than half the state's 52 rural hospitals are at risk of closing.
- ❖ **Increase Mental Health Services and Resources for Children.**
The number of children and youth experiencing mental health challenges has skyrocketed in the last decade and the resources available to them and their families have not increased to meet the need. State budgets must reflect its value for human life and adequately fund mental health services and resources to improve early assessment, access and affordability for children 18 and younger,
- ❖ **Enhance Tobacco & Electronic Cigarette Law to Reduce Underage Vaping Without Criminalizing Youth.**
Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), such as e-cigarettes and vapes, are the most commonly used tobacco products among youth. Most ENDS contain nicotine, a highly addictive substance that can harm a developing brain. While it is crucial to enforce Alabama's law that prohibits the use of tobacco and alternative nicotine products by individuals aged 21 and younger, it is equally important to minimize children's exposure to the criminal justice system. Early involvement with the criminal justice system can have lifelong consequences, and criminalizing children for vaping has not been shown to reduce youth vaping rates effectively.

EDUCATION

- ❖ **Investment in Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program.**
Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program is one of the top programs in the country in preparing the state's four-year-olds, especially children from low-income families, to start school. Those who completed the program are less likely to be chronically absent and need special education services during their educational journey. Increasing funding will expand access to all four-year-olds whose families want them to participate.
- ❖ **Modernize the Public School Funding Formula to a Student Needs-Based Plan.**
Alabama ranks 39th in the nation in the amount of money spent per pupil. The state's outdated school funding formula lacks transparency and does not allow schools to adjust how they spend money to address students' unique needs. Modernizing Alabama's school funding formula will help ensure every child has the resources they need to reach their full potential. By providing better education, we can reduce crime rates, improve public health, and create a more prosperous society for everyone.

SAFETY

- ❖ **Strengthen Alabama's Child Passenger Safety Law.**
Auto vehicle accidents are one of the leading causes for preventable child deaths in Alabama. As research develops and technology changes, staying current on child passenger safety standards is important. Alabama must adopt new Child Passenger Safety Guidelines as presented by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to reduce preventable child deaths statewide.
- ❖ **Enact Firearm Safety Laws to Reduce Preventable Child Deaths.**
Firearms are the second leading cause of preventable child and teen deaths in Alabama. Common sense legislation requiring safety devices for firearms and more accountability of firearm owners combined with an education campaign will help protect young lives from preventable and needless deaths.
- ❖ **Defend Alabama's Juvenile Justice Act and Other Data-Driven and Research-Based Juvenile Justice Measures.**
Prefiled bills indicate an attack on Alabama's Juvenile Justice Act and an attempt to bring back regressive and overly punitive juvenile justice policies. Early exposure to the criminal justice system, especially during adolescence, can have life-long detrimental effects, including increased risk of future criminal activity, poorer mental and physical health, educational barriers, employment difficulties, social stigma, and a higher likelihood of recidivism.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

❖ **Increase Funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative.**

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) was enacted in 2015 to increase access to healthy, affordable food options for children and families in underserved areas. Investments in the state fund have been minimal. To continue providing benefits to low-income families, especially those living in rural areas and other areas known as food deserts, it is essential to continue investing in the HFFI. Grants from the HFFI help with projects that supply fresh produce and other groceries to communities with limited access to grocery stores.

❖ **Support Funding of Summer EBT and Other Food & Nutrition Programs in FY 26 and beyond.**

Lawmakers passed \$10 million in funding during the 2024 legislative session to take advantage of the federal Summer EBT feeding program. We urge lawmakers to continue to allocate \$10M in funding for Summer EBT and other food and nutrition programs for children and families at risk of food insecurity and make up for lost funding due to federal cuts to these programs.

Educational & Collaborative Support Opportunities:

❖ Support increased access to food and/or food assistance programs that provide healthy food options for children and families, including Healthy Food Financing Initiative, WIC, SNAP, School Nutrition, Double Up Food Bucks, and Universal Breakfast.

❖ Support Fortify Alabama's efforts to promote legislation mandating the fortification of corn masa flour in Alabama to reduce spina bifida rates in the state's growing Hispanic community.

❖ Increase awareness about the danger social media and the use of digital devices, including cell phones, pose to children and youth. Support policies and programs that help regulate the use of these products to prevent and/or reduce harm to people 18 and under.

❖ Support expansion and affordability of broadband services throughout the state to improve access to resources and services for all Alabamians regardless of where they live.

❖ Support policies and programs that improve the child care industry, specifically expanding access to high-quality child care, including protecting federal investments in policies and programs to stabilize child care and Head Start as Alabama works to identify long-term solutions for addressing workforce development and other industry obstacles.