



THE ARISE REPORT

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Arise Legislative Day is Tuesday, April 2!

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

Join us at Arise's 2024 Legislative Day on Tuesday, April 2, at the Alabama 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. We will announce the focus of Legislative Day closer to the date, but it could focus on closing the health coverage gap, further untaxing groceries and funding needed priorities.

We will gather at the State House in Room 200 for a briefing, news conference and lunch. Then folks will meet with their legislators. We will end the day with a debrief of the legislative visits and a membership meeting. (*See enclosure for more details.*)

Visit alarise.org/2024legislativeday to register. Please register by March 25.

There is no cost to register, but a \$15 donation for lunch is suggested.

We look forward to seeing you!

Grocery tax, protecting voting rights among Arise priorities for 2024 session

By Akiesha Anderson, policy and advocacy director | akiesha@alarise.org

The Alabama Legislature began its second regular session of the current quadrennium on Feb. 6. Lawmakers already have voted on numerous hot-button issues early in this session, and Alabama Arise anticipates that trend may continue. The upcoming presidential election, Alabama's early primary date and other political factors may color what legislative leaders prioritize this year. The regular session will end no later than May 20.

ELIMINATE THE STATE GROCERY TAX

Arise was thrilled last year to help pass monumental legislation that reduced the state sales tax on groceries by 1 cent on Sept. 1, 2023. That law also authorized an additional 1-cent cut to the grocery tax in a future year. Combined, those reductions will cut the state grocery tax by half over time, from 4% to 2%.

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Government for the people?

By Robyn Hyden, executive director
robyn@alarise.org

Lately, I am struck by how many elected officials view their job as serving private industry and large corporations instead of their constituents and voters.

This belief comes out in the ways some officials discuss Alabama’s “labor force participation” concerns. Instead of increasing workers’ autonomy by investing in public transportation, affordable housing, health care or child care – or instead of addressing low wages by incentivizing good-paying jobs with benefits – too many leaders continue simply to propose more and more corporate tax credits. It’s a tired “solution” repeatedly demonstrated not to work to address the root causes of poverty and labor force decline.

This attitude was also obvious in recent opinion pieces circulated by Gov. Kay Ivey and Commerce Secretary Ellen McNair opposing the United Auto Workers (UAW) organizing drive targeting multiple Alabama auto manufacturers. Rather than viewing labor unions as partners that could increase wages and benefits for Alabama families, our elected officials frame them as a threat to the economy and general order.

We know we can’t address poverty in Alabama without empowering every single family to access good-paying jobs with benefits and worker protections. With your support, Arise will continue to advance a pro-worker, pro-family agenda. And we will refuse to accept measly corporate tax breaks as the solution to our problems.

State, federal budgets need to do more for children

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

It’s budget season at the Alabama Legislature and in Congress. But many of our state and federal representatives are not doing enough to meet the very real needs of ordinary people.

Gov. Kay Ivey has now proposed an Education Trust Fund budget as well as a General Fund budget, which funds Medicaid, mental health care and other state services. Ivey recommended a needed 4% funding increase for local K-12 schools. But she failed to include funding for two Alabama Arise priorities: public transportation and universal school breakfast. Arise will advocate actively for these critical needs as the budgets move through the Legislature.

HELP NEEDED FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

At the same time, Ivey and education budget committee chairs are pushing HB 129 and SB 61, which would divert at least \$100 million annually from K-12 public schools to pay for private school and homeschooling. This proposal would undermine efforts to improve public education and would lay groundwork for

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Recent Alabama execution underscores ongoing need for death penalty reform

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

This year already has seen a number of Alabama Arise priorities in the news, and death penalty reform is no exception. Unfortunately, Alabama recently became the first state to perform an execution using the unsafe and untested method known as nitrogen hypoxia. The state executed Kenneth Smith using this method on Jan. 25, despite concerns from many Alabamians and even the United Nations.

Smith’s execution could not have legally occurred if he had been sentenced today. After finding him guilty, the jury voted 11-1 for Smith to be sentenced

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Welcome, Victoria!



Victoria Enyinda Petty joined Arise as a maternal health fellow in January. She is a passionate maternal health researcher dedicated to improving the health outcomes of women. Her professional journey spans several industries, including higher education, corporate wellness, disease intervention and event management – providing her a unique and diverse perspective in all her pursuits.

Victoria holds a bachelor's degree in health care management and a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). She is a

fourth-year Ph.D. student in the Community Health Promotion program at UAB.

Thank you, Wendy!

Arise's longtime bookkeeper Wendy Tucker retired at the end of 2023. We want to give a huge thank-you to Wendy for all she did to help our organization run smoothly for more than 17 years! Wendy's passion for Arise's mission was evident in every aspect of her work.

Wendy developed the accounting structure for Alabama Arise and Alabama Arise Action from the ground up. She helped us create budgets, kept a close eye on the finances and managed employee benefits. The foundation she created has supported Arise through seasons of change and growth and will continue to support the financial integrity of both organizations.

We will miss having her positive attitude, sense of humor, knowledge and insights as a part of the Arise team. Happy retirement, Wendy!



How to use the 'people power' of Arise

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

As an Arise member, you are a part of our network of more than 150 organizations and more than 1,500 individuals committed to building a better Alabama. And our people power is growing! Your membership also comes with benefits that we want you to use. You can:

- Connect with like-minded members at our Legislative Day and Annual Meeting.
- Vote on our annual policy priorities and elect our board of directors.
- Access insider policy resources, such as the Daily News Digest, quarterly print newsletters and weekly legislative update emails during the legislative session.
- Work directly with our organizers and lobbyist to advocate for the causes you care about.

The 2024 legislative session has just begun, and your support is more important now than ever. Will you help us build momentum for change? Here are a few ideas:

- Visit alarise.org/donate to make a monthly gift to help us sustain our work year-round.
- Share our social media posts so we can grow our reach.
- Ask your friends, family and groups you're a part of to join Arise, too.

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

Arise announces newly formed staff union

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

The staff, leadership and board of Alabama Arise announced in February the launch of Alabama Arise Workers United-Communications Workers of America (AAWU-CWA), the newly formed Arise staff union. AAWU-CWA is an affiliate of CWA Local 3908.

"I am honored to be a part of an organization that allowed us to make our own choice about whether or not to join a union," said Formeeca Tripp, Arise's southeast Alabama organizer. "It is reassuring to know I have job security and a voice as a union-represented worker."

All eligible Arise staff members signed authorization cards to join CWA in November after a short organizing campaign. Arise staff and board leadership unanimously supported voluntary recognition of the union.



Alabama Arise's staff members and staff leadership team pose for a photo during a retreat in November 2023 near Columbiana.

"As a pro-labor organization, voluntarily recognizing our staff union was an easy choice for Arise," Arise executive director Robyn Hyden said. "As a leader, I think our greatest accomplishment is supporting and growing leadership at all levels of our organization. I believe everyone has something to contribute to building a strong and healthy workplace, and I'm so proud of our staff for taking this step."

AAWU-CWA has elected bargaining representatives and stewards to negotiate an initial bargaining agreement.

"I'm honored and energized to be one of Alabama Arise's first union stewards," said McKenzie Burton, an Arise development associate and one of AAWU-CWA's newly elected stewards. "Unions are vital in uplifting and protecting Alabama's workforce. They built the middle class and are what will rebuild the middle class. I am humbled to be a part of an organization that continues to champion these values at every level."

The protection and power of Alabama's workers are critical to Arise's mission to improve the lives of Alabamians who are marginalized by poverty.

"I grew up as a child of a union parent, and now I can pass that experience on to my children," Tripp said.

In loving memory of Jim Littleton



Alabama Arise expresses our gratitude and respect for Jim Littleton, who contributed so much to the community and betterment of Alabama for all people, especially those considered “the least of these.” We join his family in mourning the passing of a great man.

Mr. Littleton died in January at age 84. He was Arise’s pivotal first hire, serving as legislative coordinator in our early years. His high integrity and deep compassion laid a foundation upon which we still build our work today.

We’ll miss Mr. Littleton’s wisdom and his kind smile. We’re grateful for his longtime support of our mission and his unwavering belief that Alabama can and should be a better place for everyone. We celebrate Mr. Littleton’s life, which was well-lived and an inspiration to so many.

Lifting voices together

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

The statewide organizing that Alabama Arise has done since our founding has made Arise unique among our national partners. For us, engaging members and people in the community, especially those directly impacted by the issues, is essential to our values. The voices of the people must be included in the policymaking process. To that end, we work with local partners across the state to engage folks in advocacy.



Six lawmakers and more than 100 constituents attended a legislative meet and greet event that Alabama Arise co-hosted Jan. 22 at Dauphin Way United Methodist Church in Mobile. We’re grateful for all of our supporters who advocate for a better, more inclusive Alabama!

This year, we started 2024 with a flurry of opportunities to engage people in the policymaking process. Since mid-January, the Arise organizing team, working with local partners, has collectively engaged more than 300 people to help them prepare for the legislative session. We have informed people about issues and equipped them for advocacy. We have facilitated spaces for people to raise their voices, including legislative forums in Mobile and Fairhope. And we have built new relationships while strengthening existing ones.

We invite others to join us and add their voices to advocacy efforts that help us shape a better Alabama for all!

Arise work wins national recognition!

Alabama Arise staff members were proud to take home two Graphies in December during the State Priorities Partnership's Connect Conference in Atlanta. The Graphies are a lighthearted ceremony meant to celebrate the work of the numerous organizations in the nationwide partnership. Arise was proud to win in two categories: Best Development Collateral and Best Outreach Collateral. Below left: Arise staff who attended the conference pose for a picture. Below right: Storyteller Whit Sides accepts the award for Best Outreach Collateral for her "See the Gap" series on Alabama's health coverage gap.



The State of Working Alabama 2023



Since the 1990s, Alabama has bet big on the auto industry. It has been a high-stakes effort to rebuild the state's economy around high-wage manufacturing, raise the wages of Alabama's workers and reduce economic distress across the state. A quarter-century after the first M-Class rolled off the Mercedes-Benz assembly line in Vance, Alabama Arise's 2023 edition of *The State of Working Alabama* assesses the results of the drive to bring the automotive manufacturing industry to our state.

The report analyzes the ways in which Alabama's auto industry has met or fallen short of its potential. Our report shows the heavy use of tax incentives in our state's economic development strategy. It also reveals how a worker-focused development strategy would bring better pay and benefits than the company-focused strategy that Alabama has prioritized. We released the report in November, and its findings continue to attract media attention amid the United Auto Workers' ongoing campaign to unionize Alabama auto plants.

Read the full report at alarise.org/sowa2023.

2024 SESSION

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Under the law, the second 1-cent reduction will occur in the first year when Education Trust Fund (ETF) revenues are projected to grow by 3.5% or more. Unfortunately, projections indicate ETF revenues will grow by only 2% in 2025. Thus, the additional 1-cent grocery tax reduction likely will occur in a future year rather than in September 2024.

This 3.5% growth provision, however, came as an amendment just before lawmakers passed the bill. The original version of the bill would have reduced the grocery tax by another 1 cent as long as annual ETF revenue growth was at least 2%. During a Feb. 12 meeting of Alabama's Joint Study Commission on Grocery Taxation, Arise urged legislators to amend the law to reduce the growth threshold to 2%, as originally proposed. This change would allow Alabamians to receive the additional reduction sooner rather than later.

We will continue to push the Legislature to finish what it started with regard to cutting the grocery tax. We also will oppose budget legislation that we find alarming, such as the CHOOSE Act, which would divert at least \$100 million of ETF money each year to non-public schools. At press time, the House had passed this proposal (HB 129, sponsored by Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville), and a Senate committee had held a public hearing on its own version.

PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS AND PRESERVE CHILD LABOR SAFEGUARDS

Lawmakers have advanced two other troubling bills so far this year. The Senate passed SB 1, sponsored by Sen. Garlan Gudger, R-Cullman, which would criminalize many efforts to attempt to assist people with absentee voting. The Senate also passed SB 53, sponsored by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, which would eliminate the eligibility to work for 14- and 15-year-olds. This requirement is an important safeguard that helps protect children from exploitative child labor practices. Arise successfully advocated to amend SB 53 to require data collection about injuries and labor violations.

ADVANCE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

It is an understatement to say that Alabama's criminal justice system is in need of reform. A U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit accuses our state's overcrowded prison system of violating the Constitution. And our state's parole rates are abysmally low – just 8% in fiscal year 2023.

With those factors and others, Arise has a lot to keep us busy with regard to criminal justice reform. We will support legislation to reform our death penalty laws. And we will support efforts to reform the felony murder rule, which allows a person to be convicted of first-degree murder even if they did not intend to or did not actually kill anyone.

FUND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Inadequate funding for public transportation keeps thousands of people across Alabama from meeting basic needs. Though lawmakers created the Alabama Public Transportation Trust Fund (PTTF) in 2018 to help fix our transit issues, the Legislature has never funded it. That is why Arise is urging lawmakers to include a General Fund appropriation for public transportation to rectify this oversight.

Ultimately, the return on transit investment makes allocating money to the PTTF a wise use of public funds. In fact, every \$1 million invested in transit creates 49 full-time jobs, many of which are long-term jobs with good pay. An appropriation of up to \$50 million from the General Fund to the PTTF also could empower Alabama to double its investment for operation expenses and to draw down up to \$200 million of federal matching funds for capital improvements.

Arise will do all we can this year to educate lawmakers on the benefits of investing in public transportation. We also will highlight how a lack of adequate public transit limits workforce participation and shared prosperity across Alabama.

BUDGETS

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even more efforts to defund public schools.

Ivey's General Fund budget would provide needed increases for mental health and the Department of Human Resources. But it misses the mark by not requesting money for the Housing Trust Fund and the Public Transportation Trust Fund. Arise will be working during the session to add more critical needs to the final budget.

ACTION NEEDED ON FEDERAL LEVEL TO HELP FAMILIES MAKE ENDS MEET

Federal budgets also have failed to meet critical human needs. A temporary Child Tax Credit (CTC) increase in 2021 cut the national child poverty rate by nearly half, but Congress allowed it to expire. Fortunately, the U.S. House in January passed a bill to expand the CTC for three years. But the Senate has yet to consider the measure.

About 280,000 Alabama children would benefit from the House's CTC expansion. Arise has urged U.S. Sens. Katie Britt and Tommy Tuberville to approve the CTC expansion quickly and help move thousands of Alabama kids out of poverty.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides nutritious foods for pregnant and postpartum women, babies and toddlers. But WIC faces a budget shortfall because of recent food cost increases and higher participation. Without action by Congress, 92,000 Alabama mothers and young children could lose some or all of their WIC food. Congress must pass budget legislation in March to avoid a federal shutdown, and it's critical for lawmakers to support our moms and babies by including adequate funding for WIC.

DEATH PENALTY

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to life imprisonment. However, the sentencing judge overruled the jury's wishes and imposed the death penalty, a practice known as judicial override. Lawmakers banned this practice in 2017, but the ban wasn't made retroactive. That means more than 30 people are still on Alabama's death row against the wishes of a jury.

Arise and other death penalty reform advocates supported more than 150 faith leaders as they petitioned the governor to halt Smith's execution and called for increasing transparency around the use of nitrogen hypoxia as an execution method. Similarly, we supported advocates, community members and former death row inmates who gathered at the steps



Alabama NAACP President Benard Simelton speaks at a death penalty rally in Montgomery in January. Simelton also serves as Alabama Arise's board treasurer.

of the State Capitol to protest the execution and the state's new method.

This execution and the advocacy of Alabamians demonstrates, more than ever, our state's need for death penalty reform. We must make the judicial override ban retroactive to address the injustice experienced by dozens of

people who were sentenced to death by a judge, rather than a jury of their peers. Similarly, Alabama is one of only two states that doesn't require a unanimous jury vote to sentence someone to death. In our state, only 10 of 12 jurors must agree to impose a death sentence.