



THE ARISE REPORT

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Join us for Town Hall Tuesdays!

By Presdelane Harris, organizing director
pres@alarise.org

Listening is both a value and process foundational to 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. That's why our virtual Town Hall Tuesdays return this year. These events are a chance for you to receive updates and share your vision for our 2025 priorities. *(See the enclosure.)*

Join us online July 16 and Aug. 6. Visit alarise.org/2024townhalltuesdays to register for one or both sessions.

Arise organizers are also available to meet with groups in person. Email me at pres@alarise.org to get connected.

Annual Meeting: Save the date

Mark your calendars for Arise's Annual Meeting, online and at The Legacy Annex in Montgomery from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 28. Member groups can submit 2025 issue proposals until Aug. 9 at 11:59 p.m. CDT. We'll share more details about the meeting and issue proposal process soon.

Summer EBT, Legislative Day energy highlight busy, tough 2024 session

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

You made a difference! Alabama Arise members played a decisive role this year in securing summer food assistance for more than 500,000 children starting in summer 2025. *(See page 2.)* Summer EBT funding brought an uplifting conclusion to the Alabama Legislature's 2024 regular session, which ended May 9.

The Summer EBT victory showed the power of Arise's policy analysis, organizing and advocacy. After the House passed an education budget without Summer EBT funding, Arise ramped up pressure on the Senate. Our policy team and lobbyists educated lawmakers about the program's benefits. Our communications team generated dozens of media stories to build public support. And our organizers rallied Alabamians to speak out.

Ultimately, folks like you got Summer EBT funding across the finish line. Arise advocates flooded lawmakers with more than 2,700 emails, calls and personal visits urging support. And it worked: Senators added Summer EBT to the budget, and Gov. Kay Ivey signed it into law.

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Maternal health hits home

By Robyn Hyden, executive director
robyn@alarise.org

When Arise members convened at last year's Annual Meeting to choose our 2024 legislative priorities, you voted to add maternal and infant health to our agenda. Most people didn't know I was nearly eight weeks pregnant with my first child at the time!



As our team studied how we could improve maternal and infant health outcomes through our advocacy and organizing, we learned a lot from you, our partners and our new maternal health fellow.

Little did I know that what I was learning about maternal and infant health would soon affect me personally. At a routine 28-week checkup, I was diagnosed with severe preeclampsia, one of the leading causes of maternal death. Soon after, my son Hank was born three months early, causing him to spend more than 80 days in UAB's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

While Hank and I are home now, happy and healthy, we were extremely lucky. Too many moms lack access to routine prenatal and postpartum care, transportation and paid family leave. I saw firsthand how many were struggling in our state's only Level 4 NICU. I learned that around 10% of babies born in the United States will spend some time in the NICU. In a state that claims to care about babies, mothers and families still do not have the support they need. This causes us to have the third-worst rate of maternal mortality in the country.

My family was lucky to have the support we needed. I wish the same for all those who wish to become parents. Together, Arise members envision a state where everyone has the support they need to have the family they choose. Thank you for pushing our leaders to make this a reality.

Summer EBT passage a hard-fought win for Alabama children

By LaTrell Clifford Wood, hunger policy advocate | latrell@alarise.org

Alabama Arise members helped secure a policy change this year to reduce hunger for more than 500,000 children across the state. Beginning in summer 2025, eligible children ages 5-17 will receive \$120 in Summer EBT benefits to continue to have school meals through the summer. The state must cover half of the administrative costs, but the benefits are 100% federally funded.

Children will be automatically eligible to receive Summer EBT benefits if their household receives assistance under Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Foster children and children experiencing homelessness also will qualify automatically. Applications will be required for all other eligible children.

ARISE ADVOCACY BUILDS MOMENTUM

Rep. Laura Hall, D-Huntsville, was the first legislator to inquire about Summer EBT this session during February's budget hearings. Hall offered an amendment to the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget to add Summer EBT administrative funding. But

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CHOOSE Act set to undermine funding for Alabama public schools

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

The Alabama Legislature struck a major blow against public education this session by passing the CHOOSE Act. This law likely will drain hundreds of millions of dollars annually from public schools that have long struggled with underfunding. Alabama Arise testified twice against the bill, but conservative lawmakers moved quickly to enact it.

The act – HB 129 by Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville – will divert at least \$100 million every year from Alabama's public schools. The law creates "education savings accounts" for parents to pay for private school or homeschooling.

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Building momentum for closing the coverage gap

By Debbie Smith, Cover Alabama campaign director | debbie@alarise.org

Alabama Arise and the Cover Alabama coalition have built powerful momentum to expand Medicaid and close the state's health coverage gap in recent months.

Arise held a news conference with our partners at the March of Dimes and Alabama Rural Health Association during our annual Legislative Day in April. The event highlighted how Medicaid expansion could improve infant and mortality rates in our state and keep rural hospitals open. More than 230 individuals from across the state attended and spoke up in support of the nearly 300,000 Alabamians who need health coverage.

In another encouraging development, the House and Senate Health Committees held a joint meeting in late April to hear from other states about their efforts to close the health coverage gap. This hearing was a platform for legislators and experts to explore potential solutions, drawing insights from successful initiatives in Arkansas and North Carolina.

'THEIR LOVED ONE IS NOW GETTING HELP'

Key figures from North Carolina, such as state Sen. Jim Burgin, shared their state's journey in closing the coverage gap. Burgin, a vocal opponent of Medicaid expansion in the past, highlighted the overwhelming gratitude from individuals receiving assistance.

"I live in a very rural and very conservative area," Burgin said during the hearing. "I have not had one person that has come up to me and told me, 'Jim, you shouldn't

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We're hiring!

We're grateful to former Arise policy and advocacy director Akiesha Anderson for her contributions to our work for the last two years. Akiesha has moved to live full time in Los Angeles with her husband and will work with Represent Justice, a national nonprofit and an Arise member group.

We're seeking a new policy and advocacy director to continue our work for dignity, equity and justice for Alabamians who are marginalized by poverty. The ideal candidate will be an experienced manager and public policy advocate who is passionate about justice, opportunity and racial equity.

Visit alarise.org/about/employment for more on the position and information on how to apply. Applications will be accepted until Monday, June 17, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. CDT.

Help secure Arise's future

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

Every year, members like you play a pivotal role in making progress toward our shared vision of an Alabama where everyone has the resources to live happy, productive lives.

This year, together, we secured funding for Summer EBT for more than 500,000 children. Last year, we reduced the state grocery tax for every Alabamian.

Our long-term vision is a collective effort that requires members to give financially and take action. Your ongoing support, whether through a monthly or annual gift, helps us sustain our work year-round. We deeply appreciate your commitment.

Did you know you can help Arise secure its future beyond this year? There's probably a type of gift that you haven't considered: leaving us in your will.

Regardless of your income, making a will is an important step to ensure your end-of-life wishes are known. There are online tools that can help, and consulting a financial planner would be a great idea, too.

You don't even have to tell us that you included us, though we would be glad if you did!

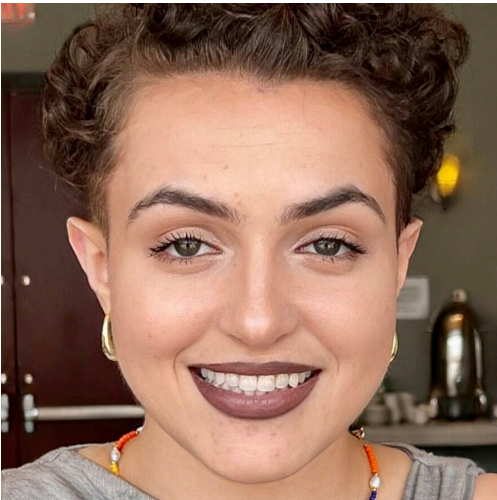
We would love to share sample language or chat about the legacy you want to leave Alabama. Reach out to me at jacob@alarise.org.

Thank you for your ongoing contributions to building a better Alabama.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

LaTrell Clifford Wood: Arise's new star at the State House

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



LaTrell Clifford Wood started as Alabama Arise's hunger policy advocate in November. Since then, the Stillman College graduate has worked tirelessly to ensure Alabama's most marginalized residents have access to food.

In her role, she advocates directly with lawmakers for legislation that supports getting food to the Alabamians who need it most. She also convenes the Hunger Free Alabama coalition of 88 organizations.

As the youngest member of the Arise staff, LaTrell offered up insights after her first legislative session.

"I think this session has really taught me to hold space for the world to grow, change and evolve, and find new room for hope," she said. "You can have a resume that is really heavy with blue collar and service experience, and those experiences are meaningful. Those are 'real jobs.'"

The intergenerational relationships with other Arise staff members proved to be helpful as she navigated an especially challenging session.

"I picked up gems of wisdom from people who have been doing this work a lot longer than me, and actualized the value that young people can bring to a space when they are treated as meaningful contributors," LaTrell said.

MAKING USE OF OPPORTUNITIES

LaTrell grew up in Irondale, a city of about 13,000 near Birmingham, and is a proud HBCU grad. Her time at Stillman brought her into hunger advocacy work and a systemic framework for change.

"There are systems in place by which we lose wisdom with the people we love. So I said to myself, 'Whatever I do, I have to take care of myself, and it has to be sustainable,'" LaTrell said. "Since I was a pandemic grad, I decided to take a break and explore more options, and that led me to Congressional Black Caucus Foundation [CBCF]."

Through the CBCF, LaTrell interned in U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell's office in Washington, D.C. That is where she first learned of Alabama Arise.

"My team in Rep. Sewell's office really advocated for me, and Akiesha [Anderson, Arise's former policy and advocacy director]

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT

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really opened the doors for me to Alabama politics, and made a safe space for me to come back home and grow and learn at Arise, and I am so grateful for her and the rest of Arise's staff for welcoming me," LaTrell said.

TELLING HER STORY

LaTrell's advocacy this year helped secure \$10 million in Summer EBT administrative funding for 2025. (*See page 2.*) She finds that telling her personal stories to lawmakers has helped her in this work.

"It was really healing and energizing to talk to Sen. [Rodger] Smitherman, whose district I grew up in, about my experiences with hunger and its impact, and see him really stand 10 toes down for children across the state," she said. "Countless children will have some measure of relief from hunger over the summer months, for generations to come. It's hard to wrap my head around in more ways than one."

After an impactful first legislative session, LaTrell has even bigger goals for Arise's hunger advocacy work. Universal school breakfast is her next advocacy priority.

"I think the first step in that is leaning into securing a state appropriation to subsidize universal school breakfast in the next year," she said.

LaTrell also said she hopes to help bring even more young people like her into the Alabama Arise fold.

"I look forward to building more avenues to meet young Alabamians where they are," she said.

AN OPTIMISTIC LOOK AT ALABAMA

As a young Alabamian who returned to the state after working elsewhere, LaTrell said she wants the rest of the world to see what Alabama is really like.

"When I go out of state, a lot of people say, 'You're from Alabama?' And there's always a tone," she said. "So my favorite experience is being able to school people on all the misconceptions they have, and all the contributions Alabamians and Alabama have made to the U.S. and the world."

LaTrell is incredibly proud of her Alabama roots and how they've shaped her family.

"My family has been domestic refugees of the state, run out by racial violence during the first wave of the Great Migration. But somehow, we find our way back, and every generation, we have been able to make a meaningful difference. And that is worth being proud of," she said.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

For those looking to get involved with the critical work of feeding Alabamians, LaTrell has some suggestions.

Arise supporters who live in or have connections in Limestone and Morgan counties, as well as Opelika, can support hunger advocacy by talking with parents, educators and superintendents in their communities about the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). More than 50% of the schools in these areas could serve universal school meals through CEP but are not. The deadline for schools to opt in for the upcoming school year is June 30.

"I encourage members to keep an eye out for hunger-related action alerts, and follow us on Facebook at Hunger Free Alabama!" LaTrell said.

SESSION OVERVIEW

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Our members also displayed their passion for change during Arise's annual Legislative Day on April 2. More than 230 people packed the State House in support of our Cover Alabama campaign to close Alabama's health coverage gap. *(See page 3.)*

Lawmakers dealt setbacks to several Arise legislative priorities this year but made important progress on others. Through it all, our members kept speaking out for policies to improve the lives of Alabamians marginalized by poverty. *(See page 7.)*

SETBACKS ON SCHOOL FUNDING, VOTING RIGHTS, RACIAL EQUITY

Early in the session, legislators enacted three harmful new laws, all of which Arise opposed. One was the CHOOSE Act (HB 129 by Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville). Over time, this law could divert hundreds of millions of dollars annually from public schools to private schools and homeschooling. *(See page 2.)*

Another bad bill rushed into law was SB 1 by Sen. Garlan Gudger, R-Cullman, which criminalizes several forms of assistance with absentee ballot applications. Arise and other advocates fear this law could have a chilling effect on good-faith efforts to assist people who need help exercising their voting rights.

A third shortsighted new law is SB 129 by Sen. Will Barfoot, R-Pike Road. The act forbids state agencies and public schools and universities from sponsoring numerous diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs. It also authorizes firings of employees found to violate the act knowingly. In late May, Jacksonville State University became the first university to close its DEI office in response to this law.

Later, legislators passed two new laws that undermine worker protections. SB 53 by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, removes the requirement for an eligibility to work form for 14- and 15-year-olds. And Orr's SB 231 makes companies ineligible for state or local tax incentives if they voluntarily recognize a union.

GOOD NEW LAWS ON CHILD CARE, HOUSING, CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

One positive workers' rights law this year was SB 119 by Sen. Robert Stewart, D-Selma, which increases penalties for child labor violations. The Legislature also created tax credits designed to increase access to child care (HB 358 by Rep. Anthony Daniels, D-Huntsville) and workforce housing (HB 346 by Rep. Cynthia Almond, R-Tuscaloosa). And Orr's SB 270 improved access to public records.

Lawmakers also enacted two good criminal justice and due process reforms. Almond's HB 275 will increase pay for many lawyers representing indigent defendants. And HB 188 by Rep. Terri Collins, R-Decatur, requires a uniform hearing process and hearing rights for students suspended or expelled from public K-12 schools.

THE WORK CONTINUES

Several other Arise-backed bills made major progress but came up just short of passage. HB 29 by Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa (allowing resentencing hearings for some defendants convicted under the Habitual Felony Offender Act) won House committee approval. Orr's SB 62 (removing state sales tax from many infant and maternity products) passed the Senate but never reached the House floor. And HB 309 by Rep. Ginny Shaver, R-Leesburg (providing paid parental leave for state employees) passed the House but died on the Senate calendar.

With your support, Arise will keep advocating for important policy changes like these in 2025 and beyond. We will keep working to expand Medicaid and eliminate the state grocery tax. And we will keep strengthening our movement for a better, more inclusive Alabama.

Arise member impact in 2024

2,713

Total contacts on Summer EBT

1,633

Total contacts on closing the health coverage gap

1,555

Total contacts on workers' rights

930

Total contacts on the CHOOSE Act

688

Total contacts on protecting voting rights

1,417

Total contacts on other legislation

More than **8,900** contacts with policymakers!



SUMMER EBT

Continued from page 2

the House approved the budget without it.

Arise then kicked advocacy efforts into high gear. Hundreds of our supporters demanded that their senators support Summer EBT funding, and Arise generated dozens of media stories to increase public awareness and pressure. Reports from Senate secretaries and members foreshadowed Summer EBT's success. Several said they were overwhelmed by the number of emails and calls they were receiving.

Legislative supporters kept up the push, too. Hall joined Rep. Barbara Drummond, D-Mobile, in efforts to build momentum for Summer EBT in the Senate. Sens. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile; Garlan Gudger, R-Cullman; and Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, submitted requests to add an ETF line item for Summer EBT.

A VICTORY TO REDUCE HUNGER IN ALABAMA

Arise and other Hunger Free Alabama coalition members made their case directly to the Senate's ETF budget committee April 25, testifying in support of Summer EBT. Our advocacy worked. The following week, the committee added \$10 million for the Department of Human Resources to administer Summer EBT in partnership with the state Department of Education.

The full Senate approved the budget 30-0 in early May. And after a brief jump-scare moment when lawmakers delayed the bill in a conference committee, the House and Senate both voted unanimously for the final budget – including the Summer EBT funding – on May 9, the session's final day. Gov. Kay Ivey signed the budget into law on May 15.

Arise is relieved by the great news that Alabama children and families will be able to participate in this essential program in summer 2025. And we are inundated with gratitude for our members and partners who responded to our action alerts. Your advocacy made the difference!

COVERAGE GAP

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Above: Cover Alabama campaign director Debbie Smith speaks during Legislative Day. Front page: Our members gather for a news conference during Legislative Day. For more photos, check out Alabama Arise on Facebook.

have done that, and we're against you for doing that.' But I've had hundreds of people come up to me and thank me because their loved one is now getting help."

The meeting seemed to drive a shift in attitudes among some conservative legislators. Many have expressed an openness to exploring avenues for closing the coverage gap.

LOOKING FORWARD

In the coming months, Cover Alabama will continue to beat the drum in support of Medicaid expansion. We are so grateful for your continued support.

Together, we are making significant strides toward Medicaid expansion in Alabama.

Let's continue to raise our voices, engage with lawmakers and advocate for equitable health care access for every Alabamian.

CHOOSE ACT

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In 2025 and 2026, only families with incomes at or below 300% of the federal poverty level will be eligible. But starting in 2027, the accounts will be available to all parents, no matter how wealthy the participating families are, and regardless of whether their children have ever attended public schools.

BEGINS NEXT YEAR

Beginning Jan. 1, 2025, Alabama will establish annual refundable tax credits of up to \$7,000 per child for children enrolled in private schools and of up to \$2,000 per child for children who are homeschooled. A refundable tax credit means parents whose children attend private school or who are homeschooled could receive more in private school vouchers than they pay in income taxes.

The bill establishes a CHOOSE Act Fund, which can accumulate as much as \$500 million for private schools and homeschooling. That money otherwise would fund public education. Schools receiving these funds would have to meet licensure and testing requirements but would not have to use the same standardized tests that public schools do.

LOOSER REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Participating schools are required not to discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin. But the new law does not explicitly forbid discrimination on the basis of gender or gender identity. Participating schools also do not have to conform to admission or hiring policies, meaning they can deny admission to children with special needs and can hire uncertified teachers. Participating schools also are allowed to impose religious practices and criteria.

Voucher programs like the CHOOSE Act have been accompanied by steep declines in public school spending in multiple states, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found. These programs also have not improved educational outcomes, even for students enrolled in private schools, EPI found. EPI researchers concluded that "the only reason for this policy thrust is ideology rooted in hostility to public education."



Arise

2024 TOWN HALL TUESDAYS

We're listening!



Three ways to lift your voice and share your vision for our 2025 legislative agenda:

- Register for one or both of these online summer listening sessions.
- Contact your area organizer about arranging a virtual or in-person meeting.
- Talk to your area organizer about submitting an issue proposal by Aug. 9 if you are the contact person for an Arise member group.

July 16 at 6 p.m. - A better Alabama is possible

Our vision for a better Alabama can be realized with commitment and perseverance. Together, we are committed to policy changes that matter to those who are marginalized by poverty, and we persevere in raising our voices for change. Join this session to discuss advances we made this year and to hear from each other about potential legislative priorities moving forward.

Aug. 6 at 6 p.m. - Building toward a better Alabama

We continue to be fueled by hope in our vision of a better Alabama for all. This session is another opportunity to discuss the progress we made this year and to hear from each other about the changes you want to see next year.

Arise organizers:

Stan Johnson: stan@alarise.org (*Northwest*)

Formeeca Tripp: formeeca@alarise.org (*Southeast*)

Adam Keller: adam@alarise.org (*Northeast*)

Pres Harris: pres@alarise.org (*Southwest*)

Registration is required. Sign up here:
ALARISE.ORG/2024TOWNHALLTUESDAYS



SAVE THE DATE!

Alabama Arise will be taking part in **Feeding Change: Nourishing Alabama's Future**. This transformative event will occur in partnership with several hunger, food, nutrition and agriculture organizations and leaders across Alabama.

This statewide landmark summit will take place on **Nov. 6-7, 2024**, at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel and Spa at the Convention Center.

In addition to keynote speakers and networking opportunities, breakout sessions will cover a range of topics, including:

- Emerging issues in agriculture
- Rural food infrastructure
- Enhancing food access
- Bridging gaps, building resilience
- Food as medicine
- Cultivating skills for impact

For more information, please email hsi@auburn.edu.