

**The Opportunity Alliance
Public Policy Agenda
Fiscal Year
July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018**

Mission: The Opportunity Alliance works with people to build better lives and stronger communities. We provide advocacy, leadership and support to identify the goals and address the needs of individuals, families, and communities.

The Opportunity Alliance believes it is our obligation to communicate to constituents, staff, and community partners on the policy issues that impact our clients. Additionally, we believe that our Public Policy Agenda will assist policy-makers in crafting the best possible governmental policies in the areas of food security, housing, employment, health, and education, while also tackling important policies that strengthen communities at-large. Over the past year, we have received valuable input from the constituents we serve, the staff at The Opportunity Alliance, our community partners, and from the Community Needs Assessment. In concert with our mission, we will focus on the following policy matters at the municipal, state, and federal levels, over the course of the 2018 Fiscal year:

Food Security

The ability of people living in poverty and those with low income wages to provide basic needs for themselves and their children is a daily challenge. Further, the cost of providing a nutritious diet is often beyond their financial capacity.

Therefore, TOA will focus its attention on the following:

- We will work with our community partners to expand access of food distribution through Pantries, Farmer's Markets and Community Centers.
- We will support changes in regulations that expand the eligibility of the Federal SNAP (former food stamp) program.

Housing

Housing costs and the ability to pay rent in the greater Portland area are daunting, and low-income housing stock is at its all-time low. Rental costs consume between 30 - 50 % of family's income which is unsustainable.

Therefore, TOA will focus its attention on the following:

- TOA will work with our local housing partners, Maine Housing, and the Cumberland County legislators to support legislation that will increase rental housing for working poor and low-income families.
- TOA will advocate for increases in rental subsidies to keep pace with the local market prices.

Employment

We believe that one of the major pathways out of poverty for our families is for parents to obtain and maintain employment. The ability to begin a career is only envisioned when adequate supports are identified and available to the family. The most often identified support is quality child care.

Therefore, TOA will focus its attention on the following:

- TOA will work with our partners to expand the numbers of quality child care slots (level 4, which is the highest rating the state of Maine gives to childcare centers) and to increase the childcare subsidy equal to 75% of market rate.

Health

States and communities improve population health by ensuring access to the health services. Over the past six years 70,000 Maine residents have lost their MaineCare (Medicaid) coverage due to changes in eligibility. The ability of these individuals and families to obtain health care is almost non-existent, essentially reduced to receiving health and behavioral health treatment in Emergency Departments across the state.

Therefore, TOA will focus its attention on the following:

- TOA will take an active role in the upcoming referendum (Nov 2017) to expand Maine Care for individuals living with children over 200 percent of poverty, Adults 18,19 & 20 years of age, and adults without children.
- We believe that the Behavioral Health Home and Opioid Health Home models should be available to uninsured individuals as well as those covered by Maine Care. Therefore, we will support legislation that seeks state revenue dollars to fund the uninsured.

Education

Investment in education is important for people, communities and the economy. Quality Early Childhood Experiences lay the foundation for future success and is a powerful and proven economic development investment. Living in low income households poses potential burdens for children ranging from financial hardship to developmental delays. These and other factors can have negative effects on educational outcomes. Research shows that low income children often trail their higher income peers in terms of performance. If we are to address this achievement gap we will need to commit to making substantive changes to our systems.

Therefore, TOA will focus its attention on the following:

- TOA will support/advocate to increase participation/access to quality early childhood experiences.
- TOA will support bills to increase public pre-K/Head Start, Early Head Start and home visiting expansion.
- TOA will advocate to ensure that the childcare rates move from the current 50% of market rate to 75%

- Join efforts to improve the quality of “informal care”, by providing resources and training. Informal care is also known as *Friend and Neighbor Care* and refers to childcare provided by grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbors.