



**COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS**

**Public Policy Priorities**  
Calendar Years 2015 – 2016

## Table of Contents

Public Policy Priorities Introduction . . . . .	3
CHN Leadership Issues . . . . .	4
Ensuring a Fair and Responsible Budget that Meets Human Needs . . . . .	4
Promoting a Progressive Tax Code That Raises Adequate Revenues . . . . .	8
CHN Supportive Issues . . . . .	11
Restoring Opportunity and Shared Prosperity . . . . .	11
Building a Stronger Adult Education and Workforce System . . . . .	13
Promoting Fairness in the Workplace . . . . .	15
Improving Job Quality and Meeting Family Responsibilities . . . . .	17
Promoting High Quality Affordable Health Care for Everyone . . . . .	20
Promoting Constructive and Fair Immigration Policy for a Stronger America . . . . .	21
Eradicating Hunger in the United States. . . . .	23
Protecting and Improving the Well Being of America’s Children . . . . .	23
Building Pathways out of Poverty to Reconnect America’s Youth. . . . .	26
Promoting Inclusive Policies for People with Disabilities . . . . .	28
Ensuring Financial Security for the Aging and People with Disabilities . . . . .	29
Improving Housing and Preventing Homelessness . . . . .	31
Working Toward Foreclosure Prevention and a Better Housing Market for All . . . . .	33
Ensuring Effective Consumer Protections. . . . .	35
Ensuring Access to Justice . . . . .	36
Reforming the Justice System . . . . .	37
Reclaiming Our Democracy. . . . .	40
Maintaining a Comprehensive National Framework for Measuring Economic Security & Hardship . . . . .	41
Implementing Existing Federal Policies . . . . .	43

## Public Policy Priorities Introduction

The United States is the richest nation on earth. But for a very large proportion of Americans, economic insecurity is a growing fact of life. Poverty remains stubbornly high, at 14.5 percent in 2013. But that does not begin to convey the precarious footing for millions of people. Nearly one-third of families (31.6 percent) dipped below the poverty line for at least two months from 2009 to 2011. One in three Americans were near poverty in 2013 (below twice the poverty line, or below \$37,104 for a three-person family). Unemployment has declined markedly since the Great Recession, but wages for many are too low to provide security. The lowest 40 percent of workers earn less today than in 2000, after adjusting for inflation.

For people of color, people with disabilities, women, children, youth, and immigrants, poverty and low-wage work are even more prevalent. A damaging combination of market forces and government policy are excluding a large swath of our population from full participation in our economy. People with debt, criminal records, or long-term unemployment, who lack education or legal immigrant status face exclusion from full opportunities for work and from safety net protections.

It is true that a strong economy makes it easier to provide the funding to meet the needs described in this compilation of public policy priorities. But it is also true that meeting these human needs is necessary if we are to rebuild a strong economy. Taken together, the policy priorities of the Coalition on Human Needs for 2015-2016 will lead to substantial job creation and ensure that most Americans have the opportunity to work at jobs with decent pay and benefits, with a supportive framework of protections and resources to ensure access to health care, education, housing, food, and income during periods when work is not possible or not sufficient to provide for basic needs.

These policy priorities recognize that private sector economic forces alone will not spur the expansion of participation needed for stable and broadly shared prosperity. Today's economy is evidence of that, with virtually all of the gains made since the Great Recession captured by the wealthiest among us. The revenue policies espoused here will reverse current aspects of the tax code that worsen inequality. Additional equitably collected revenues coupled with willingness to borrow now will enable us to invest in an expanded and well-prepared labor force and in the infrastructure and new technologies needed for sustained economic growth.

If the policies described in these pages were fully implemented, our people would be healthier, better educated, and better able to get and keep good jobs. Poverty, hunger, and homelessness would decline. More children would get the start they need, and more seniors would have a secure retirement. The long-term unemployed would have opportunities to re-enter the economic mainstream. The "Recession Generation" – our nation's youth - would not be left behind, but would have the chance to get the education and the jobs they need without a punishing burden of debt.

Disinvesting in human needs or cutting some important programs in order to fund others jeopardizes our nation's future prosperity by excluding millions from full economic participation. The policy priorities that follow are responsible, well-documented approaches that improve lives, strengthen economic security, and build our shared future.

## CHN Leadership Issues

Issues in this category are cross cutting and affect the entire human needs community. The Coalition will play a leadership role on these issues. Issues in this category will get the highest possible attention from CHN staff where appropriate and feasible. CHN will:

- Advocate for these priorities before Congress and the Administration;
- Organize and actively participate in lobbying visits;
- Hold strategy sessions;
- Initiate sign-on letters and circulate sign-on letters initiated by others;
- Host seminars, briefings and webinars;
- Educate the human needs community and its network on the issues;
- Highlight and provide information on the status of these issues in our emails, web site, and in *The Human Needs Report*;
- Update CHN members on their status at bi-weekly Advocates' meetings.

The following public policy initiatives are identified as **Leadership Issues**:

## **Ensuring a Fair and Responsible Budget that Meets Human Needs**

The federal budget should be an expression of national priorities and an engine for realizing them. American priorities have always emphasized opportunity for all to participate and share in our nation's economic growth. The Great Recession and its aftermath have tested our will and understanding of the federal budget's power to contribute to growth. Initially, expenditures made through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) significantly reduced the severity of the recession. Counting the value of increased SNAP/food stamps, low-income tax credits, and other federal expenditures, child poverty was kept from increasing, despite the recession's huge increase in unemployment. Other developed nations that did not increase their spending in response to the recession saw increases in child poverty. However, these expenditures came to an end while many Americans were still struggling and were replaced by multi-year reductions in discretionary spending.

Most Americans are not sharing in the economic growth that slowly returned after the recession's official end. The economic gains that have occurred have been concentrated almost entirely in the hands of the richest Americans and corporations. Their gains, combined with stagnant incomes and declining wealth for the majority of Americans, have contributed to

inequality near its “highest levels in the past hundred years,” as described by Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen.

Private market forces have driven the rise in inequality. But the federal budget, because of its spending reductions coupled with historically low tax rates on the wealthy and corporations, has exacerbated these trends. Job growth has been very slow, in part because reduced government expenditures led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of public jobs. The loss of more than 300,000 low-cost child care slots since 2006 made it harder for parents to work. Cuts to SNAP and unemployment insurance reduced spending among the neediest, slowing the economy. More than 500,000 public service jobs have been lost since 2007.

Some persist in believing that economic progress is caused by reductions in federal spending and revenues. But the evidence tells another story. While ARRA funding increases reduced the harsh severity of the recession, the funding reductions that followed slowed growth and stalled poverty reduction. While unemployment insurance (UI) lifted 2.5 million people out of poverty in 2012, only 2.2 million were kept out of poverty by UI in 2013, after the start of federal cuts to unemployment benefits. Deep austerity measures in other developed nations have stalled economic growth in those countries. Just as spending reductions have impeded economic growth, low tax rates have not helped either. Effective tax rates on the wealthiest one-tenth of one percent in the U.S. have been cut in half (from 51 percent to 26 percent) over the past 50 years, with a substantial reduction from the 2001-2003 tax cuts. Multi-billion dollar gains at the top did not lead to shared economic growth, but instead contributed to economic bubbles as excess wealth chased profits in technology and then housing.

An accurate view of the federal budget’s role recognizes that our nation is only as strong as its people. Federal investments can ensure that all people have the building blocks of a decent life: health care, lifelong education, opportunities to work, income supplements when work is not possible, and affordable necessities, including food, housing, and caregiving for children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

The federal government should also invest in economic building blocks: cyber- and physical infrastructure, basic research, carefully designed incentives to encourage new technologies, and renewable, clean energy sources.

With interest rates extremely low, there could not be a better time for federal investments in all these critical components of economic growth. A truly responsible budget makes these investments now so that we do not saddle future generations with the enormous costs of replacing inadequately maintained roads, bridges, and public buildings. A responsible budget similarly invests in our people, so that our future workforce is well-educated and healthy, able to contribute to innovation and economic growth.

Making these investments will require federal spending caps to be lifted. Under existing caps, domestic discretionary spending is expected to drop to 3.1 percent of GDP in 2016, according to the Congressional Budget Office. That will be the lowest level in the last 50 years, measured as

its share of the economy. We cannot fund the education, child care, transportation, housing, public health, energy and environmental improvements the nation needs at these levels. Moreover, Congress must provide funding for new program requirements it has mandated through legislation, for example the reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant..

Nor should we replace these spending caps with drastic cuts in basic safety net programs such as Social Security, the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP, unemployment insurance, or SSI. Leaving people without income or health care harms them and takes money out of the economy that would otherwise have created or saved jobs.

This is not to say that long-term deficit projections do not need to be addressed. Some solutions have already started, in the form of health care savings required by the Affordable Care Act. Other savings, especially from eliminating waste in Pentagon spending, other federal contracting, and ineffective tax expenditures, should be part of federal budgeting. Further, adequate revenues from fair sources must be part of federal budget plans, so that we can afford the investments we need.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a federal budget that gives priority to human needs, recognizing that investments are needed to provide opportunity and security for low- and moderate-income people. The President's budget, Congressional Budget Resolution, and subsequent appropriations bills should all provide for real growth in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and realize the goal of reducing poverty and increasing economic security for all Americans.

**CHN supports** an even-handed and open assessment of expenditures and revenues through the annual budget process based on program effectiveness at meeting important goals. Pentagon, domestic, and tax expenditures alike must be subject to this assessment. Military spending has doubled during the last decade, at the expense of resources for human needs. Even with the sequestration cuts to the Defense Department in 2013, the Pentagon budget returned to 2007 levels, a time when we were paying for two major wars. If the additional annual sequestration cuts were to resume through 2021, the Pentagon will still have more in real terms than it spent at the height of the Cold War. The U.S. spends more on its military than the next 17 countries combined and substantial Pentagon budget reductions are possible with no sacrifice to U.S. security. Support for military spending reductions has spread across the political spectrum. Responsible Pentagon savings should lead to improved national and economic security for our nation. Other expenditures such as agricultural subsidies or health care payments should be assessed for their usefulness in promoting program goals. Similarly, tax expenditures intended to encourage economic growth should be evaluated for their cost-effectiveness and role in lessening or exacerbating inequality. *(See next section for a fuller discussion of CHN positions on revenues.)*

**CHN supports** raising spending caps and ending the sequestration cuts governing domestic discretionary spending now scheduled to return starting in FY 2016. Domestic and international appropriations have been [cut by 15 percent](#), taking inflation into account, between FYs 2010

and 2014. Many [human needs programs](#) including job training, home heating/cooling assistance, certain affordable housing, juvenile justice programs and adult education have been cut even more deeply. Adequate levels of investment in education, public health, job creation, services to help workers find jobs and to meet the needs of low-income seniors, children, and people with disabilities cannot take place within current caps. However, while the discretionary spending caps enacted under the Budget Control Act remain in place, **CHN supports** maintaining separate caps for domestic/international and defense expenditures. **CHN opposes** use of Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding, which the Pentagon has used to evade budget caps intended for its regular operations. **CHN supports** the use of emergency spending outside budget caps to meet urgent, unanticipated, threatening and temporary needs. Public health emergencies such as the Ebola outbreak or natural disaster relief certainly meet this definition under current law. Terrorist threats needing a military response can also be funded as emergencies by Congress, providing them with more oversight than OCO allows.

**CHN supports** investments in FY 2015 and FY 2016 to ensure that economic recovery is shared with low- and moderate-income Americans, even if these expenditures will increase the deficit temporarily. Examples of effective ways to share prosperity include federal assistance for the long-term jobless, improved SNAP/food stamp benefits and eligibility, aid to states, job creation initiatives, and making permanent the 2009 improvements to refundable tax credits targeted to low-income people.

**CHN supports** a long-range balanced approach to reducing the deficit in which increased revenues from those most able to pay make up the majority of further deficit reduction measures. The federal deficit in FY 2014 declined to \$506 billion, a reduction of \$170 billion below the FY 2013 deficit and only 2.9 percent of GDP, less than the average over the past 40 years. Now the economy needs more investment. Anticipating a return to higher deficits in the future, budgets should incorporate the goal of stabilizing the debt to GDP ratio by the end of a ten-year period. CHN urges policy-makers to protect low-income people from harm as they develop deficit reduction plans, and to base their decisions on analyses of revenue and expenditure proposals to determine the impacts on disparate income groups.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** restrictive structural changes to entitlement programs such as block grants or per capita caps, as well as dollar cuts in critical human needs programs that would hamper their effectiveness or their ability to serve eligible families, and **supports** ensuring that program funding is adjusted to address unmet needs and keep pace with inflation. **CHN opposes** the use of reconciliation instructions intended to force cuts or restrictions in basic safety net programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, unemployment insurance and Supplemental Security Income, and **opposes** cuts in Social Security and Medicare that reduce their essential role in providing economic security and health care for millions of Americans.

**CHN opposes** budget rules changes that make it easier to cut taxes while making it procedurally difficult to consider revenue or expenditure increases. **CHN opposes** the use of “dynamic scoring” to justify costly tax cuts, in part because economists from all over the ideological spectrum agree that its use is more a political tool than a reasoned assessment of policy.

**CHN opposes** budget enforcement procedures that are limited to across-the-board spending cuts without requiring revenue increases when deficit reduction targets are not met. **CHN opposes** new program requirements that Congress does not adequately fund to implement. **CHN opposes** offsetting cuts in one priority program to pay for another. **CHN opposes** fast-track procedures for terminating or cutting services, benefits, and core program operations. **CHN opposes** constitutional amendments to require a balanced budget.

## Promoting a Progressive Tax Code That Raises Adequate Revenues

Decades of tax policies that have disproportionately benefited higher-income individuals and big corporations have left the country with a tax code that is both unbalanced and insufficient to meet national needs. Unfair tax breaks cost the federal government billions of dollars a year – revenue that could be used to protect the most vulnerable now and expand opportunity for a stronger future for everyone.

Major budget and tax issues will be hotly debated in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. Proposals to cut tax rates for corporations and wealthy individuals are likely to be advanced in the name of “tax reform,” even as proposals to slash and dismantle safety net programs are considered.

Tax reform should make the tax system more progressive and raise substantial additional revenue from the wealthiest individuals and corporations. If corporate tax reform moves forward, it should generate significant revenues. Loopholes that encourage corporations to shift jobs and profits overseas should be closed to put the nation on a more sustainable fiscal path, support investments in the job creation measures our economy needs, and protect and strengthen vital services, infrastructure, and programs for those struggling to make ends meet.

“Tax extenders” – a package of tax breaks that are officially temporary but are routinely renewed every year or two without sufficient analysis as to whether they remain (or ever were) good tax policy – mostly benefit big business. They should not be made permanent, and they should not be extended at all unless their cost is offset by closing other corporate tax loopholes. It is especially troubling that Congress has demanded that preventing sharp sequester cuts to programs that protect families and extending federal emergency unemployment insurance for long-term unemployed workers be paid for without requiring that tax extenders be paid for.

The improvements to the refundable tax credits enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and extended through 2017 by the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (ATRA) must be made permanent. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC) and American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) help avert hardship for millions of working parents and their children, provide much-needed funding for college students, and create increased demand for products and services to boost the economy.



Allowing the ARRA improvements to the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit to expire would push 16 million people – including 8 million children – into or deeper into poverty. Unless Congress acts, millions of low-income working families will lose all or part of their credits at the end of 2017, when three key provisions of the CTC and EITC are set to expire.

- *CTC refundability threshold.* The portion of the CTC that families can receive as a refund currently begins to phase in once a family's earnings reach \$3,000. If this provision expires, then in 2018 the threshold will more than quadruple. A family would have to earn more than \$14,000 before they could qualify for any refund.
- *EITC marriage penalty relief.* This provision currently allows married couples to receive a credit at modestly higher income levels than they would otherwise. If it expires, many married couples would lose some or all of their credit.
- *EITC "third tier" amount for families with three or more children.* Currently, families with three or more children are eligible for a larger EITC than families with two children. If this provision expires, larger families would lose up to \$672 of their credit.

As Congress considers tax policy options, it should not hurt working families through harmful tax increases nor resulting harmful policy outcomes, such as undermining employer sponsored health care or retirement benefits. This is important because working families continue to face daily struggles with their retirement security and health care concerns.

The prevalence of misclassified workers erodes federal tax revenues and the Social Security Trust Fund, in the form of unpaid and uncollectible income taxes, Social Security and Medicare (FICA) taxes, and unemployment (FUTA) taxes. Unfortunately, employers who misclassify employees as independent contractors to evade taxes can save payroll costs, and have an unfair and illegal advantage over businesses that play by the rules.

Everyone who works in the U.S. is required to pay taxes regardless of their immigration status. Individuals who are not eligible for a Social Security Number (SSN) – including both legal and undocumented immigrants – must file their taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). ITIN filers contribute billions of dollars each year to federal, state and local coffers. The IRS must eliminate administrative barriers to applying for and receiving an ITIN in order to ensure that all taxpayers – regardless of their immigration status – are able to comply with their federal tax obligations. Additionally, because ITIN filers are responsible for complying with the same tax rules as people who file with SSNs, those filers should be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and the American Opportunity Tax Credit.

To ensure that America has the resources it needs to invest in meeting human needs and to directly promote a more equitable society, the **Coalition on Human Needs supports** tax policies that raise adequate revenues in a progressive manner, including credits that help struggling families. **CHN supports** taxing income from investments (capital gains and dividends

income) at the same rate as income from work (ordinary income). **CHN supports** progressive new sources of revenue, such as financial transaction taxes on Wall Street trading and a Financial Crises Responsibility Fee, which would reduce the risk of and offset the costs related to firms that might be considered “too big to fail”.

**CHN supports** strengthening the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) by increasing the credit for both families with children and adults without qualifying children. For workers who are not caring for children, **CHN supports** lowering the EITC eligibility age below the current 25 and extending the credit to workers above age 64. **CHN supports** extending the Child Tax Credit to more low-income families by phasing it in beginning with the first dollar of earnings. **CHN supports** making refundable and improving the child and dependent care tax credit. **CHN supports** shifting from tax deductions that encourage retirement savings and home ownership, which provide greater benefits to higher-income people who need them the least, to refundable tax credits, which provide benefits more closely matched to need.

**CHN supports** increased funding for the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) to help low-income taxpayers get every tax credit to which they are entitled. **CHN supports** ITIN eligibility for tax credits designed to help working families support their children and pay for college.

**CHN supports** closing loopholes that allow corporations and wealthy individuals to avoid or evade hundreds of billions of dollars in tax liability. **CHN supports** tax reform proposals that target corporate tax avoidance, reduce incentives for corporations to shift jobs and profits offshore, and crack down on tax havens where corporations and wealthy individuals evade taxes. **CHN supports** legislative and administrative actions that prevent corporations from pretending to be foreign companies for tax purposes. **CHN supports** addressing abuses separately if overall tax reform is not possible in the next year.

**CHN supports** legislative and administrative actions that will curb and/or penalize misclassification of employees as independent contractors.

**CHN supports** reducing tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans, who receive billions in tax benefits each year that do not serve the national interest, increase inequality, and starve the government of revenues needed for important services. **CHN supports** a significantly more progressive estate tax at a rate at least as high as the rate in effect in 2009 and an exemption no higher than that applicable in 2009.

**CHN supports** adequate federal appropriations for the IRS to strengthen and increase enforcement activities.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** making any “tax (cut) extenders” permanent or renewing them for any period of time without paying for them by increasing revenues from fair sources. **CHN opposes** cutting funding for human needs programs to offset the cost of tax

cuts. **CHN opposes** cutting funding for human needs programs to pay for refundable tax credits including the EITC and CTC.

## **CHN Supportive Issues**

Issues in this category are those in which CHN will serve to “bridge” the gap between the human needs community and any other coalitions working on the identified issues. The Coalition will not take the lead on these issues but will support other leaders and expand their advocacy capacity. As resources permit, CHN will:

- Advocate on behalf of these issues before Congress and the Administration;
- Disseminate sign-on letters generated by other organizations to CHN member groups;
- Co-host briefings and forums on supportive issues;
- Identify member organizations to participate in advocacy efforts, but will not take primary responsibility for arranging meetings or actions on the issue;
- Track the legislation in *The Human Needs Report*; and
- Provide updates during the bi-weekly Advocates’ meetings.

The following public policy initiatives are identified as **Supportive Issues**:

## **Restoring Opportunity and Shared Prosperity**

**Jobs:** Employment is a central component of economic growth. In May 2014, the U.S economy hit an important milestone – the total number of jobs in the economy again reached the level achieved prior to the recession, more than six and a half years ago. We have now had 56 consecutive months with private sector payroll growth. While justly celebrating this progress, it is important to acknowledge that we have a long way to go before we can stop worrying about job growth. Because people enter the labor force each month, we actually need to more than replace the number of jobs lost in order to maintain constant levels of employment. The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institute calculates that we still have a shortfall of 5.2 million jobs to bring employment rates up to pre-recession levels. In October 2014, 9 million workers were unemployed, with 32 percent (2.9 million) jobless for 27 weeks or more. An additional 7 million workers were working part-time although they would have preferred full-time employment, and 770,000 were discouraged workers who had given up. Neither of these groups is counted as unemployed.

Some groups face particularly high unemployment rates, including Hispanics (6.8 percent), Blacks (10.9 percent), adults with less than a high school degree (7.9 percent) and teenagers (18.6 percent). For black teenagers, the unemployment rate is 32.6 percent, down nearly 4 percentage points from one year ago, but still unacceptably high. (Data as of October 2014)

***Economic Insecurity and Inequality:*** Economic security has been declining for most Americans for decades. Living standards have deteriorated, as families only managed to prevent real incomes from falling by adding work hours. When earnings could not cover regular expenses, families increased debt. The Great Recession made things much worse, and incomes have not yet recovered from the hit they took. In 2013, real median household income was 8.0 percent lower than in 2007, the year before the recession began. Retirement security, already affected by the decline in defined benefit retirement plans, decreased substantially because of lost investments and reduced home values. Income inequality has risen since 1999. In this economic expansion that officially began in the second half of 2009, the stock market is up 60%, GDP is up 8%, corporate profits as a share of national income are at historic highs, yet median household income is down 5%, with all figures adjusted for inflation.

Poverty rates have come down from their recent levels, but remain unacceptably high. Four years after the Great Recession officially ended, nearly one in five children and young adults lived in poverty. Young children, black and Hispanic children, and young adults were particularly likely to be poor.

America needs a comprehensive economic plan that will put people back to work. CHN recognizes that many different approaches should be tried, and supports oversight by the Obama Administration and Congressional committees to determine whether the options chosen are effective at creating new jobs, and whether they reach population groups most likely to be out of work and poor.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** grants to states and localities for job creation initiatives targeted to provide jobs for low-income people who are at risk of being left behind in the recovery, such as minorities, parents, both custodial and non-custodial, ex-offenders, youth, people with disabilities, and workers over age 50. Such grants should encourage partnerships with the private sector to employ low-income and unemployed workers in growth sectors such as health care, renewable energy, and transportation. Efforts should also be targeted to disadvantaged communities. For these grants, and for other federally funded job creation initiatives, effective strategies should include on-the-job training to prepare workers both for the first job and for subsequent moves up the career ladder. Direct government interventions to create jobs should rebuild our crumbling infrastructure, put teachers and other essential school staff back to work, and fully fund public safety officers and first responders. Any financial incentives provided to businesses must be inextricably linked to additional hiring for good jobs.

**CHN supports** increased funding to encourage states and localities to create temporary jobs targeted to provide employment experience and opportunities for low-income workers and those who have exhausted unemployment benefits. Jobs in the public and private sectors can be created through initiatives similar to the successful but expired Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund, summer and year-round job placements for youth, and transitional jobs to help people with little job experience and/or severe barriers to employment, including ex-offenders. **CHN supports** expansion of AmeriCorps, summer and

year round employment programs and paid work experiences to create jobs and service opportunities for jobless young Americans. Temporary jobs programs should include strong anti-displacement protections that ensure that current workers do not lose their jobs or work hours due to these programs, and that no permanent positions are lost. Those placed in temporary subsidized positions should be paid the prevailing wage for that work. **CHN supports** enhanced funding for robust and personalized reemployment services to provide workers with the services they need to get training where needed and conduct a more effective job search. **CHN supports** continued federal incentives for states to modernize their UI policies by counting a worker's most recent earnings and allowing certain additional domestic circumstances (such as escaping from domestic violence) to qualify as "good cause" for leaving a job.

**CHN supports** a robust safety net for those who are unable to find work, or who are poor even though they are working. **CHN supports** robust work and training opportunities that connect unemployed and underemployed workers to high quality jobs. **CHN supports** full implementation of the Section 3 Economic Opportunities for Low and Very Low Income Persons' obligation to provide job training, employment, and contracting opportunities for low and very low income residents.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** any attempts to weaken safety net programs through punitive work requirements or arbitrary time limits on benefit receipt.

## **Building a Stronger Adult Education and Workforce System**

Approximately 36 million working-age adults lack the basic literacy skills or education credentials necessary to succeed in the postsecondary education and training that provide one path to family-supporting jobs and careers in today's economy. Among those most affected by the weak economy are individuals facing distinctive barriers to employment, older workers needing to retool their skills to match their physical capabilities, immigrant workers, school dropouts and other at-risk youth and young adults, and those who must adjust to job dislocations. Now that the Workforce Innovation and Investment Act (WIOA) was signed into law in 2014, federal policy should continue to support state and local efforts to develop seamless career pathways between adult education, job training, and higher education programs to ensure workers have the skills and work supports they need to obtain employment and advance their careers over time. And those who seek a college education should not be deterred by the cost and crushing student loan debt.

Adult Education and workforce programs authorized under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and now WIOA have been severely underfunded, leaving them hard pressed to address the needs of workers and employers. Lack of child care is a barrier to participation for many low-income parents. Opportunities for important improvements in Adult Education and workforce programs contained in WIOA cannot be fully realized unless states and localities are provided the resources they need to fully implement the law. Currently, the Adult

Education system can serve only a small fraction of adults with low basic skills with existing funding. The Employment Service, the state-administered, federally-funded labor exchange, also has been severely underfunded for years. Employers rely on this agency to locate employees with the skills they require for open positions, and employees rely on it to find work that requires their skill-set as well as for career guidance on education and training to develop new skills. Significant new investments are needed to give the Employment Service the tools it needs to meet its growing mission under WIOA, including capacity-building for front-line job counselors and adequate staffing.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a revitalized workforce system that will contribute to economic and job growth and enable workers to secure living wage jobs with decent benefits. This includes increased federal support for all workforce programs, including WIOA, the Employment Service, and unemployment insurance operations, as well as additional investments in literacy, adult basic education and career and technical education programs, and training for nontraditional occupations or those in which one gender is less than 25% of the workforce.

**CHN supports** greater availability and adequacy of Pell Grants so those pursuing a postsecondary education are not burdened with debt as they attempt to gain a foothold in the labor force.

**CHN supports** greater alignment of workforce development, postsecondary, and human services programs, including child care assistance, to create pathways to marketable postsecondary credentials for low-income adults and disadvantaged youth.

**CHN supports** WIOA regulations that ensure the continued public operation of the Employment Service and Unemployment Insurance programs and equitable cost sharing among WIOA programs to pay for the general operation of the one-stop centers. **CHN supports** increasing the focus on serving the most vulnerable workers—low-income adults and youth who have limited skills, lack work experience, and face other barriers to economic success; expanding education and training options to help participants access good jobs and advance in their careers; helping disadvantaged and unemployed adults and youth earn while they learn through support services and effective employment-based activities; and aligning planning and accountability policies across core programs to support more unified approaches to serving low-income, low-skilled individuals.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** policies that treat rapid reemployment or “work first” policies as a higher priority than needed wage replacement for jobless workers or receiving education, training and placement help for good jobs. **CHN opposes** any congressional action to reverse HHS’s effort to ensure that states have adequate flexibility to devise welfare-to-work strategies that best meet the needs of their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) populations.

## Promoting Fairness in the Workplace

Economic insecurity is also rooted in the workplace itself. Most workers are employed “at will” and therefore can and do lose their jobs without good reason or recourse. Unions represent fewer than 12% of all workers -- 35.3% of public employees and just 6.7% of private sector workers. Unionization and collective bargaining protects employees from arbitrary employer actions and is a proven path to the middle class. The median union weekly wage is \$950, compared to \$750 for nonunionized workers, and unionized workers are more likely to have robust, employer-sponsored health insurance and defined-benefit pension plans. Low unionization rates are due in large part to legal obstacles to certifying union representation. And, inherently governmental public sector jobs have been privatized, with the resulting loss of union protections and benefits for employees and decline in services.

More than 30 years after passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, pregnant women still face challenges on the job. This is particularly true of jobs that require physical effort like lifting, standing for long periods, and repetitive motion. Many of these women could continue to work without risk to themselves or their pregnancies with slight job modifications and accommodations that employers already are required to provide for employees with disabilities.

Employment discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers is widespread. It occurs both in hiring and on the job. It violates core American values of fairness and equality by discriminating against qualified individuals based on characteristics unrelated to the job.

The increased prevalence of employers misclassifying their employees as independent contractors has had a negative impact on workers, government coffers and law-abiding employers. It strips workers of their rights as employees to the minimum wage, overtime pay, health and safety protections, coverage under anti-discrimination laws, and to join a union. \$3-4 billion a year in federal income and employment tax revenue is lost due to misclassification. And, businesses that play by the rules get unfairly underbid by those that misclassify their workers.

Ironically, blatant discrimination in hiring against the unemployed is the new norm. Employers assume that anyone who is not currently employed, or is unemployed for any length of time, must not be a competitive candidate and as a result, many employers are automatically screening out the unemployed from their applicant pool. And, some employers improperly use credit checks to screen potential employees. This also harms those workers hit hardest by the Great Recession and the still-incomplete economic recovery. Credit checks should only be used where there is a business necessity to do so. These practices are a nasty Catch-22 for the long-term unemployed – they have poor credit because they do not have jobs, yet they cannot get new jobs because of their poor credit and unemployed status.

Immigrant workers remain among some of the most vulnerable to employer abuse. Facing wage theft, sexual harassment and intimidation, employers routinely use employees' perceived or actual lack of immigration status to thwart wage and discrimination claims and union organizing efforts. This dynamic drives down wages and working conditions for all workers.

The Obama Administration has revitalized the federal agencies that are tasked with protecting workers, including the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance. We must ensure that these agencies have the pro-worker vision, leadership and dedicated personnel required to vigorously enforce employees' rights at work.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** workers' freedom to form unions and to bargain collectively, including collective bargaining rights for public safety officers, card check recognition in lieu of formal unionization elections, and removing barriers to reaching first contracts.

**CHN supports** legislation that would allow pregnant women to continue to do their jobs and support their families by requiring employers to make the same kinds of accommodations for pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions as they are currently required to do for employees with disabilities.

**CHN supports** legislation that ensures workplace equality by protecting LGBT workers from employment discrimination, including discriminatory hiring, firing, promotion, wages and benefits, and protection from retaliation for reporting these practices. This would build on President Obama's executive order which prohibits the federal government and its contractors from discriminating based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

**CHN supports** policies and adequate funding to enforce workplace protections such as the right to minimum wage and overtime pay, child labor laws, healthy and safe workplaces, and equal opportunity and equal treatment.

**CHN supports** legislative and administrative actions that will curb misclassification of employees as independent contractors.

**CHN supports** legislative and administrative efforts to secure full employee rights for workers currently excluded from federal labor law protections, including domestic workers, farmworkers, day laborers, in-home child care providers and others.

**CHN supports** legislative and administrative actions that will curb employers' abuse of immigrant workers.



**CHN supports** federal legislation that would make the practice of hiring discrimination against the long-term unemployed illegal.

**CHN supports** legislation that would limit employers' use of credit checks to screen potential employees, thus leveling the playing field for those workers who have suffered through economic hard-times.

**CHN supports** and encourages the Senate to vote on and approve qualified presidential appointees to key federal boards and commissions that protect workers' rights.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** any federal action that would erode worker protections, including the right to organize, to receive fair wages, to work in healthy and safe workplaces, to be whistleblowers, and to be free from discrimination. **CHN opposes** any federal action that would weaken unions' strength. **CHN opposes** turning back the clock on federal minimum wage and overtime protections for home care workers. **CHN opposes** immigration enforcement actions that undermine the enforcement of labor, health and safety, anti-retaliation and other employment laws.

## Improving Job Quality and Meeting Family Responsibilities

Increasingly, work – even full-time work – does not provide sufficient compensation to raise families out of poverty. Moreover, for millions of workers, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, today's jobs leave them struggling to meet their responsibilities at work and at home. Job quality improvements in (1) wages; (2) access to paid leave; (3) work schedule fairness; (4) part-time parity; and (5) access to hours are needed to strengthen our workforce, families, and economy.

The ranks of the working poor exceed 47 million, driven largely by the steep erosion of wage standards. Over the last 40 years, the real value of the federal minimum wage has fallen by close to 30 percent. Tipped workers, for whom the federal minimum wage has been stuck at a meager \$2.13 per hour for more than two decades, are even worse off. Moreover, women working full-time, year round are typically paid 78% of what men earn, with women of color earning considerably less.

Low wages harm not only working families but the economy as a whole. In contrast, improving job quality helps to boost economic growth. The last minimum wage increases to \$7.25 per hour in 2007-2009 provide evidence to this end; they generated \$5.5 billion in new consumer spending. Yet, job growth during the economic recovery has been concentrated in occupations dominated by low-wage jobs, including those in the retail, food service, and home health care industries, exacerbating the vast problems associated with inadequate wages.

Job quality extends beyond wages. Paid leave is an essential support for workers with both work and family obligations. But in the U.S., no federal law requires employers to enable workers to earn paid leaves of any kind. The U.S. is an outlier nation: 163 nations guarantee

paid sick leave and only two nations in the world – the United States and Papua New Guinea – do not guarantee paid maternity leave for new mothers.

However, there are now 15 cities and three states (Connecticut, California and Massachusetts) that have passed paid sick days laws or have laws pending executive signatures. In many jurisdictions, these laws also include paid time away from work for issues related to domestic and sexual violence, as well as stalking. Five states and Puerto Rico have Temporary Disability Insurance programs that guarantee some wage replacement when workers need extended time off from work due to short-term disabilities, including recovery from childbirth. In three states - California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island – workers have access to paid family leave insurance programs, which provide partial wage replacement for between 4 and 6 weeks.

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) offers unpaid leave for birth, adoption, serious illness, or care for a seriously ill family member. Only about 60 percent of the workforce is guaranteed unpaid leave under the FMLA. Firms with fewer than 50 employees are not covered by the law, employees who have been with their employers for less than approximately one year are ineligible for FMLA leave, and some part-time employees working fewer than 1250 hours in a calendar year are excluded from FMLA coverage. As well, about 40 percent of private sector workers – and 80 percent of the lowest wage workers – have no access to paid sick days. The result is that too many workers face lost wages or jobs if they take time to get well or care for an ill family member.

Many workers, particularly those earning lower wages, have unpredictable, unstable, or rigid job schedules, with their employers often denying them any input into their work hours or shifts. More than 40 percent of early career workers (ages 26 to 32) in hourly jobs receive one week or less advance notice of their job schedules. The vast majority of parents of young children in hourly jobs experience fluctuation in their total hours per week of almost 40 percent. Only a handful of states require a minimum amount of pay (“reporting pay”) when workers report for work at the employer’s request and are not given work. In some sectors, requiring workers to call in the morning to find out if there is work for them that day is common practice.

Fair scheduling practices enable workers to better meet their responsibilities at work and home, enabling them to budget and make ends meet, and allowing them to plan for other facets of their lives, including child care, school, and second jobs. Such practices include advance notification of schedules, stability in the number of hours and timing of shifts workers receive, reporting pay guarantees, and opportunities for input into their schedules.

While some workers meet responsibilities at home by taking on part-time work, 7 million workers are working part-time involuntarily. All part-time workers should have prorated access to the same benefits, training, working conditions, and opportunities for advancement available to full-time workers. Employers should be required to offer available work hours to their part-time work force prior to hiring additional part-timers. In some jurisdictions rules that

would require such employer practices have passed (as in San Francisco, CA and SeaTac, WA) or are under consideration.

Access to paid leave, fair scheduling practices, and part-time equity has serious implications for the current and future workforce. These working conditions determine the capacity of families to function effectively and for communities to thrive. Ripple effects of deteriorating job quality include poor child health and developmental outcomes, reduced consumer demand for local and national businesses' goods and services and greater economic insecurity at the family, community, and national levels. As well, poor working conditions influence the efficacy of investments in other arenas, including child care and early education, job training and higher education, and health care.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** an increase in the federal minimum wage and minimum wage for tipped workers. The minimum wage should be restored to its historic purchasing power and indexed to keep pace with the rising cost of living. The tipped minimum wage should be eliminated, establishing one minimum wage for all workers. **CHN supports** requiring the payment of prevailing wages in federal contracting. **CHN supports** policies and adequate funding to enforce workplace protections such as the right to minimum wage and overtime pay, healthy and safe workplaces, equal opportunity and equal treatment. **CHN supports** federal legislation to improve gender pay equity and enforcement of equal pay laws.

**CHN supports** legislation that would establish a national minimum paid sick days' standard for employers, expand FMLA coverage, and create a national paid family and medical leave insurance program. An initial step towards national paid family and medical leave insurance is federal funding for state innovations that would create model insurance programs. Such funding would build on the U.S. Department of Labor's recent grants to five states (totaling \$500,000), enabling them to evaluate the feasibility of paid family leave programs or examine other aspects of such programs. Through Executive Order, the federal government should reward government contractors that provide paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, and fair work schedules. Further, the federal government should be a model employer, providing its employees with paid family and medical leave.

**CHN supports** legislation to create fair job schedules, including proposed laws that would give workers the right to ask for a change in their schedule without fear of retaliation; to receive sufficient advanced notice of their job schedules; to receive a minimum number of hours of work per week; to receive reporting pay if sent home from work early; to receive compensation if required to be on-call or scheduled for a "call-in shift," and to receive access to hours prior to the hiring of additional part-time workers. **CHN supports** legislation to create equitable access to benefits and pay for part-time workers.

## Promoting High Quality Affordable Health Care for Everyone

More than 40 million people in the United States do not have health insurance and as a result, millions are forgoing or delaying necessary medical care, jeopardizing their own health and economic security. Racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to be uninsured and more likely to experience disparities in access and quality. Immigrant families face difficulties accessing health coverage because of fear, confusion, and lack of language resources. The vast majority of the uninsured are in working families. In addition, millions of individuals who have health insurance still struggle to pay for the cost of care.

The Affordable Care Act gives consumers important new protections in the private insurance market, gives states the option to expand Medicaid to low-income adults, provides new benefits to Medicare beneficiaries, and strengthens the Medicare trust fund. More than 10 million non-elderly adults gained health insurance coverage between October 2013 and June 2014. While the improvements contained in the Affordable Care Act are positive first steps, many Americans, including many immigrant families, do not have access to coverage. Nearly five million adults fall into the coverage gap because they live in a state that has not yet expanded Medicaid. Funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides coverage to 8 million low- and moderate-income children, is scheduled to expire at the end of September 2015, and as many as 2 million children could lose health coverage if funding is not renewed.

As a potential solution to addressing our nation's long-term deficit, some elected officials have proposed cutting Medicare, Medicaid and/or the Affordable Care Act and shifting more of the cost burden of health care onto consumers or states. Some policy makers have proposed imposing a "per capita cap" on Medicaid, which would limit how much the federal government would provide a state according to a fixed amount per beneficiary. With reduced federal funding, states would either have to increase their own funding for Medicaid or, more likely, shift costs to beneficiaries and providers.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** guaranteed affordable, high quality health care for every person. **CHN supports** the reforms in the Affordable Care Act that protect consumers, expand coverage and improve the quality of health care. **CHN supports** expanding health care access to the remaining uninsured, including those left out of the Affordable Care Act. **CHN supports** funding for discretionary programs in the Affordable Care Act, including critical funding for public health and prevention, and for community health centers serving the remaining uninsured. **CHN supports** the expansion of Medicaid in every state so that consumers may qualify for coverage based on their income, rather than family status or disability. **CHN supports** policies that hold states accountable for using every tool available to conduct outreach and enroll all eligible people in the programs and benefits available under health reform. **CHN supports** a four-year extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** restricting the availability of coverage and care for moderate- and low-income people. **CHN opposes** restricting the availability of coverage and care for immigrants, unnecessary documentation requirements, and any barriers to health care for citizens and eligible immigrants.

**CHN opposes** any and all efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act or measures to weaken the law's goal of expanding affordable and comprehensive coverage. **CHN opposes** restrictions on funding for the Affordable Care Act, including limits or delays in the availability of tax credit subsidies for moderate-income people to purchase insurance. **CHN opposes** changes to Medicare that shift more health care costs onto low-income beneficiaries. **CHN opposes** cuts to federal Medicaid funding or changes to the structure of Medicaid that would result in shifting costs to states and to the low-income children, families, seniors, and people with disabilities who rely on it. **CHN opposes** cuts to or caps on Medicaid.

## Promoting Constructive and Fair Immigration Policy for a Stronger America

Reform of our failed immigration policy is a moral and economic imperative. There are 11.5 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, 8 million of whom are in the nation's workforce. These immigrants work in the toughest, hardest-to-fill jobs for the least amount of pay and the fewest workplace protections. Our broken immigration system leaves millions of immigrant workers without any way to become citizens, regardless of the taxes they pay and the contributions they make to the places where they work and the communities in which they live.

Despite high rates of employment, non-citizen immigrant and mixed status families experience a wide range of unnecessary hardships. Immigrants – including those lawfully present in the U.S. - are often shut out of basic economic support programs available to other taxpayers due to arbitrary eligibility restrictions that bear no relation to need. Even when eligible, immigrant and mixed status families are less likely to receive critical economic supports because of inconsistent and confusing rules, stigma and fear of repercussions. It is not surprising that non-citizens including LPRs, other visa categories and the undocumented, make up a disproportionate share of the nation's poor. Although non-citizens are fewer than 7 percent of the total U.S. population, they are 11 percent of those living in poverty.

On November 20, 2014, President Obama announced that he would use his legal authority to provide up to five million immigrants the opportunity to live and work in the U.S. without the threat of deportation and family separation. Through executive action, the President is expanding to a larger population the deferred action policy he initiated in June 2012 for young people who arrived here as children (DACA). In addition, he is establishing a new program, Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA), to allow undocumented individuals who have a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident child to apply for work authorization and protection from deportation.

These new policies provide badly needed temporary relief for many but there is more to be done. Millions of immigrants who also are deserving of work authorization and protection from deportation are not eligible under these deferred action programs. Individuals who are eligible must pay a fee that could be financially out of reach. And if they do receive deferred action, it is only conferred for a three year time period.

An effective and meaningful immigration system will advance our nation's economic growth and productivity. We will become a stronger nation when our immigrant population can assume the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship. A path to citizenship is one of the most important steps to addressing poverty in the United States. Non-citizens have nearly twice the poverty rate of naturalized citizens.

Congress must give priority to creating an immigration system that preserves family unity, provides opportunity, protects the rights of individuals and communities and strengthens the U.S. economy.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a comprehensive fix to our nation's immigration laws that includes a clear and affordable path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living and working in the US.

CHN applauds President Obama for using his executive authority to bring relief to the millions of immigrants who qualify, as well as their families and communities.

**CHN urges** Congress to fix our broken immigration system in a complete, humane and effective fashion. Congress must legalize undocumented workers and their families, provide them with an achievable and fair path to citizenship, and provide access to supports that will help them integrate into the fabric of our communities.

**CHN supports** policies that lift immigrant families out of poverty and promote economic security.

**CHN supports** equal access, regardless of immigration status, to safety net programs, refundable tax credits, public services and economic supports that meet basic human needs, including health services and insurance, education, employment benefits, nutrition assistance, and income supplements.

**CHN supports** full labor and civil rights protections for immigrant workers.

**CHN supports** full inclusion and integration of immigrants into our communities.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** policies that divide families including separating children from parents and other actions that have a divisive effect on immigrant communities and that foster restricted access to services for eligible beneficiaries. CHN opposes detaining mothers and children who are awaiting their opportunity to see a judge as they seek asylum in

the U.S.

## Eradicating Hunger in the United States

Hunger in America is recognized as the recurrent and involuntary lack of access to sufficient food due to poverty or constrained resources, which can lead to malnutrition over time. Based on USDA and Census Bureau statistics, one out of seven people in the United States live in households that face a struggle against hunger.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** efforts to expand and protect Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) access and benefits to low-income individuals and families. Congress must invest resources to make benefit allotments more adequate, open eligibility to more vulnerable people such as jobless adults, ex-offenders and immigrants, and connect more eligible people with program benefits. **CHN supports** additional funding to states to cover the costs of administering SNAP.

**CHN supports** efforts to strengthen and expand school meals, pre-school (CACFP) and out-of-school-time nutrition programs. **CHN supports** efforts to protect the integrity of the nutrition standards of the child nutrition and school meal programs and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) by relying on the scientific recommendations of the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

**CHN supports** adequate and anticipated-need funding for all food and nutrition programs during the annual appropriations process— including WIC, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), senior programs and emergency food and shelter programs.

## Protecting and Improving the Well Being of America's Children

**Poverty:** In 2013, 14 percent of the U.S. population (45 million people including 15 million children) lived below the poverty line. Twenty-two percent of children under age 6 live in poverty. Children are 23 percent of the population yet they represent one-third of people living in poverty. While two-thirds of poor children – 10.2 million – live in a single parent family, married couple families are not immune to poverty. One in ten children in married couple families was poor in 2013 and two-thirds of poor children had one or more family members working.

The younger children are, the more at risk they are of being poor and the greater the potential for long-term consequences. Early childhood poverty comes when a child's brain is developing rapidly and attention to developmental needs is critical. Nearly half of children born into poverty will be persistently poor. Research by the Urban Institute indicates 21 percent of children born poor will spend a significant amount of early adulthood in poverty and have a range of unstable employment as young adults.

Low-income, but not officially “poor” families are also at risk. Job instability leads to housing, child care, food, and health care instability for families. Children's well-being depends in part upon the mental health of their parents and their ability to care for their children. According to the Urban Institute, “...of children in families with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level, 25 percent lived with a parent who had symptoms of poor mental health, compared to only 10 percent of children in families with higher incomes, a statistically significant difference.”

**Cash Assistance:** Federal policy must respond to the needs of low-income parents so they have the resources to work and support and care for their children. Current programs are wholly inadequate. When the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was created in 1996, for every 100 families in poverty, 68 received benefits. Today, 26 families of every 100 receive benefits. In some states fewer than 10 families receive cash assistance for every 100 families in poverty. At the start of the recession, 1.69 million families were on TANF; by December 2010, despite the Great Recession, this number had only risen by 25,000 families to 1.94 million, far below the 4.7 million families served in the booming 1997 economy. The TANF block grant has not been adjusted for inflation, so states are receiving less because TANF has lost 32 percent of its value. TANF should be evaluated based on its success in reducing poverty, not reducing caseloads.

TANF and many work and income support programs come with restrictive asset limits that penalize savings and ownership that are counterproductive to the goal of helping families achieve economic security. These asset limits can make it difficult for families to get the help they need when they fall on hard times.

**Early Childhood Programs:** High-quality early childhood programs can help children develop the skills they need to succeed in school and gives parents the support they need to be productive at work. Studies show that low income children in high quality early childhood programs are less likely to be placed in special education, have lower rates of juvenile crime, and are more likely to graduate from high school. But only one in six children eligible for federal child care assistance receives it. Head Start serves only about half of eligible preschoolers and Early Head Start serves approximately four percent of eligible infants and toddlers. After-school programs can enrich children while supporting working families yet more than 14 million children (25 percent of school-age children) have no access to after-school programs.

Home visiting models funded through the Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program are designed to strengthen and improve programs and services for at-risk communities. They strengthen the early childhood system by promoting maternal and infant health, safety and development. States have just begun to provide these effective services but the program will expire in the 114th Congress if it is not extended, threatening significant progress.

**Child Welfare:** Every year approximately 3.4 million referrals are made to child protective services. Nearly 700, 000 children are victims of maltreatment; more than 400,000 are in foster



care; and more than 23,000 youth age out of foster care not well prepared for adult life. Domestic, dating, and sexual violence are costly and pervasive problems. Nearly one in four women reports experiencing domestic violence at some point in their life and about one-third of children witness violence in their home.

Four in ten abused and neglected children get no services, and others get far less than they need. Shelters and other supports for women fleeing domestic abuse cannot meet the demand. Services are needed to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect, keep children safely with their families when appropriate, and recruit adoptive parents and relative guardians to care for children who cannot return to their families from foster care. A Justice Department study indicates that 60 percent of the children surveyed were exposed to violence within the past year in their homes, schools, and communities. This exposure is associated with long-term physical, psychological, and emotional harm.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a national goal of cutting poverty in half by 2020 by supporting a range of actions to maximize opportunities for success for children and families. This includes increased investments in income assistance and work opportunities for low income families. **CHN supports** improvements to the TANF program to offer greater income supports to more low income families. **CHN supports** measuring TANF's success by poverty reduction rather than caseload reduction. **CHN supports** agency regulations that do not interfere with anti-poverty measures. **CHN supports** adequate funding for both the Community Services and Social Services Block Grants, which helps provide supportive services in communities where these children and families live.

**CHN supports** reforms to current savings and ownership limits in programs such as TANF, SNAP, LIHEAP to encourage savings and financial planning for the future.

**CHN supports** investing in children and youth and strengthening families as key poverty reduction strategies. These investments can help prevent intergenerational cycles of poverty by maximizing opportunities for success. This includes provision of critical mental health and substance abuse services to both adults and youth.

**CHN supports** the increased funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the reauthorization and increased funding for early childhood programs including Early Head Start, Head Start, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, pre-kindergarten and other programs that give young children what they need to thrive. **CHN supports** investments in afterschool and summer programs to help prevent children from losing important educational gains while away from school and to enable parents to work.

**CHN supports** legislation that helps prevent child abuse and neglect and other family crises, strengthens supports for vulnerable children, youth and families, and assists women experiencing domestic violence and their children who witness it. **CHN opposes** cuts to a range of programs that help address vulnerable children's needs, including Child Welfare Services and Promoting Safe and Stable Families. **CHN supports** the reauthorization and funding for the Child

Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). **CHN supports** reforms in federal child welfare financing that will promote improved outcomes for children by increasing and redirecting funding for community-based child abuse and child neglect prevention, specialized treatment, permanency and post-permanency services, workforce supports, and enhanced state accountability for the care of children. **CHN supports** an immigration policy that prioritizes family unity.

**CHN supports** full funding to the just reauthorized Violence Against Women Act.

**CHN supports** stronger gun laws and programs to prevent the senseless violence that continues to threaten children's safety and the safety of our communities.

### **Building Pathways out of Poverty to Reconnect America's Youth**

According to the most recent Census data, young adults account for a significant share of the poor and are poorer than other adults. Nineteen percent of young adults ages 18-24, or 5.8 million individuals, were poor. Additionally, 41.6 percent of young adults were low-income in 2013. And the deep poverty rate for young adults (10.2 percent) was higher than all other age groups, with the exception of young children. Youth of color are disproportionately poor – the poverty rate was highest among black and Hispanic young adults, with 32 percent and 21.3 percent respectively living in poverty. Even more alarming, the poverty rate for black young adults rose by 1.7 percentage points from 2012 to 2013. For young adults, living in poverty makes it more difficult for them to access quality education and training programs, especially for those living in high-poverty communities where these opportunities are particularly scarce.<sup>i</sup> Meanwhile, in poor urban and rural communities alike, our nation's high schools are losing too many young people before they graduate. An estimated 6.7 million youth ages 16 to 24 are not working, not in school and are locked out of opportunity. Over the course of his or her lifetime, a high school dropout earns, on average, about \$260,000 less than a high school graduate. Investments in work, education and training to reconnect youth are not only smart policy but are economically necessary to ensure the current and future vitality of countless American communities. Yet, the major employment and training programs targeted at this population serve less than 5 percent.

The Great Recession has had a distressing and persistent impact on youth living in high poverty communities. Five years after the end of the official recession, employment for youth and young adults remains unacceptably high at 12 percent. Linking youth to our economic recovery must be a national priority. Twenty-two percent of African Americans in this same age group are unemployed, more than twice the national average. Great employment disparities also exist among young men of color, with unemployment rates skyrocketing to 33 and 49 percent for Latino and African American teens, respectively.

Vulnerable youth, including those with limited skills and education and those attached to our juvenile justice and child welfare systems face insurmountable odds as they transition into

adulthood. Consider that one in nine Black males between ages 25 to 29 is in prison or jail in the United States. At a time when economic success increasingly requires a labor force with strong academic and occupational credentials, this level of lost talent constitutes a crisis that the nation simply cannot afford to continue to ignore.

Despite these odds, young people living in resource-poor communities possess unrivaled resiliency. They need supportive policies, programs and services, coupled with caring staff and positive adult connections to support their development and tap into their promise and potential.

Thus we need a high priority focus on dropout recovery and reengagement and targeted job creation strategies for youth and young adults. Federal policy and investments should support systemic, comprehensive, cross-systems interventions at the local level with resources sufficient to the magnitude of the challenges we are facing as a nation. The Department of Labor in partnership with the Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services and other federal agencies including Energy, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Interior must prioritize employment, education, shelter, training, mentoring and comprehensive services for youth and young adults.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a robust job creation strategy which includes subsidized summer and year-round employment, apprenticeships, and connections to private sector internships that emphasize high demand industries and employment pathways for youth and young adults targeted to high poverty communities and those with high levels of youth unemployment and high school dropout rates.

**CHN supports** job creation investments within infrastructure, energy, transportation and construction sectors that have an intentional strategy to link youth to employment pipelines and pathways within those industries.

**CHN supports** using the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Carl D. Perkins legislation, as key opportunities to support the implementation of multiple education options, dropout recovery and reengagement strategies that lead to the attainment of secondary, postsecondary and industry credentials for young people across the nation in communities with low graduation rates and high youth unemployment. It is essential that the nation's public education system play a key role in the recovery of young people who have dropped out of high school and support those who are at imminent risk of dropping out, including over-age and under-credited students.

**CHN supports** a comprehensive response to the plight of poor and homeless unaccompanied youth, including a federal commitment to provide all youth in need with access to safe shelter and appropriate supportive services.

**CHN supports** the expansion of national service and increasing the inclusion of low-income youth and young adults in giving service to their communities and gaining valuable skills

through national service programs such as AmeriCorps, the National Civilian Community Corps, Service Learning, Volunteer Generation, the Leland Emerson Fellowships and VISTA.

**CHN supports** protecting and expanding pathways to higher education and reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA), with an emphasis on making federal financial aid resources work for poor and low-income students in policy provisions such as part-time and year-round Pell Grants, restoring the Ability to Benefit, work-study reform, and transition and wrap-around supports.

**CHN supports** reforms to the juvenile and criminal justice systems that seek to eliminate racial disparities in sentencing and policing and expand comprehensive, and integrated community-based programs to formerly incarcerated individuals, such as the Second Chance. Act. These investments can help youth lead productive lives and prevent their involvement with the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems, where youth, particularly minority youth, often are subjected to unjust treatment. To help youth move forward in life, support is needed for reforms that promote investments in prevention, early intervention and re-entry supports rather than costly incarceration. (See *Criminal Justice* Recommendations on pages 38-40 for more information).

## Promoting Inclusive Policies for People with Disabilities

There are over 50 million people with disabilities-- about 20 percent of the population-- living in America. They are roughly twice as likely as the general population to live below the poverty line. In 2012, the poverty rate for individuals with disabilities ages 18 to 64 years living in the community was 29.2 percent, while the poverty rate for individuals without disabilities ages 16 to 64 years living in the community was 13.6 percent—a poverty gap of 15.7 percentage points. In September 2014, 20.1 percent of people with disabilities were in the labor force, compared to 68.5 percent of people without disabilities. Across the board, people with disabilities continue to face substandard experiences and outcomes in employment, education, housing, transportation, and health care because of inaccessible and inadequately-funded state and federal programs, outdated public policies and discrimination due to persistent fears, myths, and stereotypes surrounding disability.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** policies that increase the availability of affordable and accessible housing and transportation. **CHN supports** policies which seek to reduce the disproportionately high unemployment rate of adults with disabilities by means of workplace supports, job training, rehabilitation services, education to workforce transition programs, work incentives programs, Medicaid buy-ins, and rigorous enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights laws. **CHN supports** policies that allow people with disabilities to build assets. **CHN supports** policies which provide opportunities for people with disabilities to have greater control over resources that provide for their long-term care, would

allow Medicaid dollars to follow the person into home or community-based care, with improved wages and benefits for the direct support workforce, and would support family caregivers of people living with disabilities. **CHN supports** the continued role of Social Security in providing an economic safety net for people with disabilities and elders.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** policies that have the effect of cutting back on housing subsidies, accessible transportation, Medicaid, Social Security programs, and other critical supports for people with disabilities.

## Ensuring Financial Security for the Aging and People with Disabilities

Protecting and expanding the income security of Americans as they retire is a key component to assuring that all Americans are able to enjoy their retirement years in comfort and dignity. Unfortunately, the core systems that support Americans in retirement have eroded substantially. The “three-legged retirement stool,” on which most workers have depended, is changing dramatically. Social Security, by itself, is inadequate to ensure lifetime income security. Employer-sponsored pensions are disappearing rapidly. Persistent economic hard times and increasing income inequality have sapped Americans’ ability to save for retirement.

Social Security is observing the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its enactment in 2015. This social insurance program is the bedrock of most Americans’ retirement and protection in the event of long-term disability that renders an individual unable to support him or herself through work. About 64 million people were receiving Social Security in October 2014, including 38 million retired workers and their dependents, 6 million survivors of deceased workers, and 11 million workers with disabilities and their families. The benefit is modest. In 2014, the average monthly payment for all retired workers was about \$1,300, or \$15,600 per year. It is slightly less for a disabled worker, at about \$1,140 per month on average. Still, for more than one-third of people over the age of 65, Social Security makes up at least 90 percent of their income.

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program serves as a vital source of support for people who are elderly, blind, or have other disabilities and have very little income or assets/resources. SSI beneficiaries either receive no Social Security because they have not worked long enough to be insured, or their Social Security benefit is extremely low. SSI also provides critical income support for families caring for children with significant disabilities and severe health conditions. In 2015, the maximum monthly SSI benefit for an individual is \$733. On an annual basis, the total payment would be \$8,796, which is about 75% of the poverty level for an aged individual.

Social Security also provides important financial security for about 6.8 million children. They include 3.4 million children who receive benefits directly because a parent has died, become disabled, or retired, and an additional 3.4 million children who live with a relative receiving Social Security benefits. Social Security covers 98 percent of all children in the event of the death or disability of a caregiver although it is seldom considered to be a program for all generations.

To equal the protection provided by Social Security to a family members, it is estimated that a worker would have to purchase a life insurance policy with a face value of \$465,000.

Over the years, the Social Security Administration has established an exemplary record of efficiency in administering the programs for which it is responsible. It now faces the challenge of seeing the baby boom generation into its retirement years. Each day the SSA receives over 10,000 applications for retirement benefits alone.

Budget cuts and the sequester have reduced funding for the agency, just as its workload has expanded dramatically. Staffing declined by 11,000 employees from 2011 through 2013. Disability backlogs, long a top priority for the agency, once more are on the rise to nearly one million. To stay within its budget, SSA has had to close offices and reduce the number of hours per day the remaining offices are open to the public. In addition, the SSA has eliminated the annual mailing of statements that provided workers with detailed information about Social Security, the amount of the benefit they will receive when they retire, and the amount of wages reported to Social Security by their employers.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** proposals that protect and improve benefits while ensuring the long-term solvency of Social Security. This could include raising or removing the cap on taxable income. **CHN supports** a clean reallocation of the Social Security payroll contributions to put both trust funds (Old Age and Survivors Insurance, or OASI, and Disability Insurance, or DI) on even footing through 2033. **CHN supports** opportunities for beneficiaries to work up to their capacities while receiving Social Security disability payments and the reinstatement of the student benefit to assist those young people who go on to college. **CHN supports** strengthening the safety net provided by SSI by increasing the inadequate resource limits, updating the program income and work exclusions, which has been frozen since the program's enactment, ending eligibility time limits for refugees and other humanitarian immigrants, and bringing eligibility rules for other lawfully-residing immigrants into parity with those that apply to citizens. **CHN supports** making improvements to the sub-poverty level benefit that is provided by this program. **CHN supports** policies that ensure that SSI benefits are considered to be available only to the eligible individual.

**CHN supports** proposals to ensure that Social Security's COLA provisions prevent the erosion of benefits. **CHN supports** policies that would strengthen defined benefit pensions for public and private employees, expand coverage for low-wage workers in other employer-based retirement plans, and provide effective incentives for personal savings and asset building by low-income people. **CHN supports** Congress and the Administration working together to provide adequate administrative funding to the SSA so it can provide the high-quality service to the American people, which over the years have been the hallmark of the agency's stewardship.

**CHN supports** adequate federal appropriations to meet the growing administrative burdens and backlogs facing SSA and state agencies responsible for disability determinations, thus enabling it to fulfill its responsibilities to the American people, including providing annual statements of contributions to the Social Security program, as is required by law.

**The Coalition for Human Needs opposes** cutting already-modest Social Security benefits and cuts to eligibility, generally, including increasing the retirement age, means-testing the benefit formula or by adopting a “chained” consumer price index that would result in massive reductions in benefits received by the elderly, veterans and persons with disabilities. In addition, **CHN opposes** using the chained CPI for adjusting any means-tested benefits or for adjusting the Federal Poverty Index. **CHN opposes** replacing some or all of Social Security benefits with private accounts, and it opposes proposals that would cut or lessen the progressivity of the financial security provided by Social Security, SSDI, SSI and other federal programs that provide workers who have lost income. **CHN opposes** policies that force elderly and disabled refugees to lose their SSI or that confiscate the Social Security contributions of some workers, such as undocumented immigrants. Finally, **CHN opposes** policies that undermine defined benefit pensions.

## Improving Housing and Preventing Homelessness

Nationwide, 27% of all renter households paid more than 50% of their incomes for housing in 2012. The lowest income households in America continue to face the most serious housing challenges. In 2009, there were 9.6 million extremely low income households in America, defined as having an annual household income of 30% or less of area median income. By 2012, that number had grown to 11.5 million households. While the demand for low income housing has grown, the supply has not, resulting in a shortage of 8.2 million affordable rental units available to extremely low income households in 2012. That same year, 75% of extremely low income households spent more than half of their meager incomes on housing, including utilities.

In no state can a full-time minimum wage worker afford a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom rental unit at Fair Market Rent. In the United States, the 2014 two-bedroom Housing Wage is \$18.92. This is what someone would have to earn per hour, working 40 hours a week and 52 weeks a year, to afford the average two-bedroom rent. This national average is more than two-and-a-half times the federal minimum wage, and 52% higher than it was in 2000.

Meanwhile, the loss of affordable homes, both those subsidized by federal housing programs and affordable without subsidy, together with stagnating incomes for the lowest income groups and housing programs that are not entitlements, has resulted in fewer households receiving housing assistance compared to those eligible for it. In 2007, 27.4% of households eligible for HUD housing assistance received it; in 2011 only 23.8% did. Congress’s funding for HUD’s largest programs, which serve the lowest income households, have not kept pace with need. The 2013 sequester alone caused the loss of 100,000 housing choice vouchers at the local level.

The Administration and Congress’s focus on ending veterans’ homelessness has paid off, as cities across the U.S. are poised to meet this federal goal at the community level. The success of this effort tells us that, with resources and leadership, we can prevent and end all homelessness in the U.S.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** providing safe, decent, affordable rental housing to low income households, including households who are experiencing homelessness, through a full range of programs at HUD and USDA. CHN calls on Congress to adequately fund all of these rental housing programs through annual appropriations and dedicated funding.

**CHN supports** increasing funding for programs such as public housing, housing choice vouchers, project-based rental assistance, and homeless assistance grants, both to preserve existing assistance and to expand assistance to eligible families who cannot access these limited programs.

**CHN supports** funding for the National Housing Trust Fund so that more extremely low income households can access safe, decent, and affordable housing.

**CHN supports** funding of special population vouchers, such as for the Family Unification Program (FUP), which strengthen families by preventing foster care placements, and the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers, which provide housing and supportive services to the most vulnerable veterans.

**CHN supports** the Administration's goals to end veteran, chronic, and family and youth homelessness, and to establish a path to end all other types of homelessness.

**CHN supports** Rural Housing Service programs that help meet the needs of the lowest income households, such as the Section 515 program.

**CHN supports** tax reform that would rebalance federal housing policy and contribute to increased resources for rental housing.

In addition to rental assistance and homeless assistance programs, **CHN supports** the HOME, Section 811 Housing for Persons with Disabilities Program, Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly, and Low Income Housing Tax Credit programs, which bring communities needed resources to meet their range of housing needs. **CHN supports** efforts to affirmatively further fair housing. **CHN supports** full implementation of the Section 3 Economic Opportunities for Low and Very Low Income Persons' obligation to provide job training, employment, and contracting opportunities for low and very low income residents. **CHN supports** increased funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the use of the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and other efforts, to bring greater energy efficiency to federally-assisted housing properties.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** any proposals that would reduce the number of federally-assisted housing units available to people with the lowest incomes. **CHN opposes** any proposals that would weaken income targeting, increase residents' rents, negatively impact housing stability, restrict immigrant families' access to federal housing programs, or impose



work requirements on residents or time limits on assistance. CHN opposes any proposals that would weaken or roll back of the National Housing Trust Fund.

## Working Toward Foreclosure Prevention and a Better Housing Market for All

Millions of Americans are still reeling from the housing and financial crises. Vast numbers of families continue to deal with the sting of past foreclosures or the threat of impending foreclosures. Since the financial crisis began in September 2008, approximately 5.1 million foreclosures have been completed, and foreclosures are still at unacceptably high levels. In June and July 2014, 94,000 foreclosures were completed. By comparison, prior to the decline in the housing market in 2007, completed foreclosures averaged 21,000 per month nationwide between 2000 and 2006. Monthly foreclosures still hover at roughly double pre-crisis levels. Some levers are in place to aid with foreclosure prevention, including settlements with the large banks. Countless families would benefit from further efforts to keep borrowers in their homes and prevent neighborhood blight.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** prioritizing foreclosure prevention practices including loss mitigation efforts through principal reduction. Net present value (NPV) positive principal reductions can have many benefits for homeowners, including helping people stay in their homes while attaining more affordable mortgage payments. Additionally, investors receive better returns than they would if borrowers were forced into foreclosure, and communities are helped as well. Foreclosures can devastate neighborhoods and drive down housing prices that hurt not only the borrowers in question but their neighbors as well.

Millions of American families are struggling not only with foreclosures, but also with owing more on their homes than their homes are worth (also called being “underwater”). Hotspots exist across the country where a significant portion of families are still underwater. As of March 2014, 9.1 million households remain deeply underwater, representing 17 percent of all properties with a mortgage. **CHN supports** policies that require or encourage reducing the principal on underwater mortgages to current market values. **CHN supports** efforts to make distressed loans available for purchase by publicly owned or nonprofit entities that can restructure them through principal reduction and more affordable terms or, when saving a home is not possible, convert them to affordable housing units for community residents.

In January 2014, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s new mortgage and servicing rules went into effect. These rules were designed to prevent the kind of abusive loans and loan-marketing tactics that dominated the market in the pre-crisis years, leaving a trail of devastation from which homeowners, communities and the country are still struggling to recover. **CHN supports** the new mortgage rules, in particular the “Ability to Repay” standard, which requires all lenders to reasonably determine the ability of a borrower to repay their loan, and the “Qualified Mortgage” standard, which will give lenders an incentive to originate safer and more transparent and affordable loans. **CHN supports** the new mortgage servicing rules, and encourages vigorous enforcement of their standards, but would also like to see the rules strengthened, including through the following ways: the addition of a substantive requirement

for loss mitigation; improved protections like requiring servicers to provide document translation and language interpretation services; increasing protections for homeowners upon transfer between servicers; and improved and privately enforceable protections for homeowners who seek loan modifications and information upon the death or divorce of the original borrower.

Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data shows that even though the housing market is slowly recovering, people of color and low and moderate-income (LMI) families are continuing to receive a much lower share of mortgage loans than they have historically, and lower than what would be expected given their share of the overall population. In 2013 Black families received 4.8% of all purchase mortgage originations, a slight decrease from their share of 5.1% in 2012. This is also well below pre-crisis levels, when the share of originations averaged around 7%. Latino borrowers in 2013 received just 7.3% of all purchase mortgage originations, down from 7.7% in 2012. And the share of home-purchase loans to LMI borrowers declined significantly between 2012 and 2013, from 33.4 to 28.4 percent. This decline occurred despite growth in the overall number of home-purchase loans. Raw numbers of loans to LMI borrowers also fell from 2012 to 2013, down from 763,190 in 2012 to 742,660 in 2013. **CHN supports** efforts to increase access to safe and sustainable credit for borrowers of color and low- and moderate-income borrowers. And **CHN supports** housing counseling as an important component of increasing access to homeownership. **CHN supports** CFPB's proposed expansion of HMDA data elements that financial institutions will be required to report, and would additionally like to see other data elements included beyond what the CFPB proposed, including the disaggregation of some racial data and reporting of reasons for denials.

**CHN supports** meaningful efforts to improve and reform the housing finance system in ways that would increase access to credit for borrowers for homeownership and provide increased affordable rental housing in the United States, both cornerstones of the economic recovery and family stability. **CHN supports** efforts that would promote stability in the housing financial market, and ensure equal access to the 30-year, fixed-rate mortgage. Any reforms to the housing finance system should take care to strengthen rules for mortgage servicing. **CHN supports** reform that would include housing counseling as a part of the conversation; proper counseling could go a long way toward ensuring that first-time homebuyers avoid delinquency.

**CHN supports** Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSE) reform that would address affordable multifamily lending, as the nation is currently suffering from a growing shortage of affordable rental units. **CHN supports** GSE reform that would provide a source of funding for affordable housing initiatives, including resources for affordable rental housing through the National Housing Trust Fund. National settlements with large banks are helping some homeowners affected by the housing crisis, including 2014 settlements with Citigroup and Bank of America. **CHN supports** efforts to ensure that these settlements and future settlements deliver real benefits to the households and communities hardest hit by the crises.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** efforts that would get in the way of access to affordable rental housing. Currently, five million families cannot find affordable rental housing.

A lack of affordable rental housing can destabilize household finances and lead families into homelessness.

## Ensuring Effective Consumer Protections

Financial products and services are essential to wealth building, economic success, and family stability. Too many lower income people in this country are shut out of mainstream financial services, are harmed by high-cost and risky products and practices, or are injured by other tricks, traps and unfair practices.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** access to fair, safe and affordable financial products and services and effective consumer protections so that consumers can build assets and lead successful financial lives. **CHN opposes** practices that are unfair, deceptive or abusive or that undermine economic stability.

For consumers who have the ability to repay loans, access to safe, affordable forms of credit can help families to maintain a home, build assets for retirement, access transportation to jobs, invest in education, smooth income fluctuations, meet medical needs, and handle large or unexpected expenses. Credit reporting agencies and other companies maintain files or collect data on hundreds of millions of individuals. These practices can affect access to credit and other financial services, the cost of credit, insurance, and even employment.

**CHN supports** rules and other efforts to ensure access to safe, fair, affordable and sustainable mortgages, credit cards, auto loans, student loans, small dollar loans and other forms of credit.

**CHN opposes** predatory lending, lending that is unaffordable or leads to a cycle of debt, and discriminatory lending practices.

**CHN supports** access to safe and affordable bank accounts, prepaid cards, mobile payments, electronic payments, remittance services and other transaction products and services. **CHN supports** transparency, free access to account information, and competition and fairness in banking and transaction services. **CHN opposes** practices designed to induce consumers into incurring excessive fees. **CHN supports** effective measures to resolve disputes, errors or unauthorized charges and to control who accesses consumers' accounts. **CHN supports** government efforts to stop payment fraud.

**CHN supports** measures to ensure that data and reports kept about consumers are fair, accurate and up to date, and that financial data is kept private and is used only for appropriate purposes that do not have a disproportionately negative effect on vulnerable individuals or communities. **CHN supports** measures to ensure that consumers can effectively correct errors in their credit reports, including fair and just treatment by credit reporting agencies.

A safe and reliable car is essential to the success of many low-income families. Child care, jobs, groceries, medical appointments, and many other everyday tasks are often out of reach for families without a car. Yet, buying, financing, and keeping a reliable car is fraught with dangers.

**CHN supports** efforts to ensure that working families can get, keep, and use a reliable used car at fair terms.

Nearly half of the households in the United States are “liquid asset poor,” meaning they have less than three months’ worth of savings. Numbers are much higher for lower income individuals and households of color. Lack of savings makes it more difficult for families to weather an unforeseen expense -- such as a broken down car or a medical bill -- more vulnerable to predatory lending, and less able to buy a car or home, afford education, or prepare for retirement. While wage stagnation is a key cause of low savings, research has shown that even low income individuals can save.

**CHN supports** increased financial education and policies that encourage savings as helpful steps in promoting long-term economic security.

Individuals sometimes run into hard times, are exploited, or make bad financial decisions. **CHN supports** fair treatment of consumers who owe debts and the opportunity for second chances and a fresh start. **CHN supports** programs that work with consumers to save homes, to modify mortgages, student loans and other types of loans, and to access affordable repayment plans. **CHN opposes** unfair, deceptive or abusive debt collection practices. **CHN opposes** scams in debt settlement, credit repair, loan modification or foreclosure rescue that exploit vulnerable consumers and leave them in a worse position. **CHN supports** fair garnishment and debt collection laws that leave consumers with sufficient funds to pay for necessities. **CHN supports** fair bankruptcy laws and the ability of bankruptcy judges to modify mortgages and discharge student loans.

**CHN supports** a strong Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and efforts by other federal, state and local agencies to protect consumers. **CHN opposes** measures to make it more difficult for agencies to adopt consumer protection rules or to protect consumers.

## Ensuring Access to Justice

Access to a fair and impartial justice system is essential for all Americans. Legal rights are meaningless if they cannot be enforced. Yet our justice system increasingly favors large corporations and the wealthy and shuts out ordinary Americans. Many Americans are unable to seek legal redress because they cannot afford to hire an attorney. According to the Legal Services Corporation, for every recipient of LSC-funded civil legal aid, one eligible applicant was turned away, and less than 20 percent of low-income Americans’ legal needs are met. Buried in the fine print of many contracts are clauses that bar individuals from the courts if they are harmed by a company and that prevent courts from ordering companies to reimburse all victims if the company is found guilty of widespread misconduct. Corporate interests are also increasingly pushing legislatures and courts to make it more difficult for individuals to use the laws that protect them.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** adequate federal funding for robust civil legal services programs. **CHN supports** reform of Legal Services Corporation restrictions on the legal assistance that may be provided with federal funds, for example lifting the restriction on class action litigation. **CHN supports** access to justice and to the courts to enforce rights under the law and to receive appropriate relief from all responsible parties. **CHN opposes** forced arbitration, class action bans, and other devices that make it more difficult for individuals to access the justice system.

## Reforming the Justice System

Mass incarceration is one of the major drivers of poverty and inequity in the United States, with almost 7 million people under some form of correctional supervision or control. Further, African Americans and Latinos comprise approximately 60 percent of imprisoned individuals. Discrimination and racial disparities persist at every stage of the U.S. criminal justice system, from policing to trial to sentencing and finally to reentry. As such, key components of a broad antipoverty strategy that not only reduces poverty but boosts economic security must include enacting policies aimed at reforming our justice system in ways that stem the flow of people into the system, reduce incarceration and assist in successful reentry.

**Racial Profiling:** Racial profiling by law enforcement is the targeting of individuals as suspicious based on a set of characteristics they believe to be associated with a crime, rather than credible evidence or information linking a specific type of person to a specific criminal incident. Profiling in the United States began expanding before the terror attacks of 2001 in at least three contexts—street-level crime, counterterrorism, and immigration law enforcement. The Department of Justice (DOJ) recently issued long-awaited revisions to its profiling guidance for federal law enforcement. The revisions represent a significant step forward by expanding protected categories and limiting some of the existing loopholes. However, significant omissions exist in the areas of national security, border integrity, and the revisions do not apply to state and local enforcement.

**Police Misconduct:** In a recent report, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) notes the government’s efforts to address the persistent problem of police brutality and racial profiling. Between FY 2009 and FY 2012 the DOJ has aggressively investigated police departments, prisons, and other institutions and brought legal action where necessary.

**Excessive Police Militarization:** Policing in the United States has become dangerously militarized, largely through federal programs that arm state and local agencies with weapons for use law enforcement activities. Specifically, combating the “War on Drugs” often entails the unnecessary deployment of SWAT police teams and the use of military weapons, which disproportionately affect minority communities. For drug investigations involving minorities, SWAT teams were twice as likely to force entry into an individual’s home using violent tactics and equipment than those involving white suspects.

***Sentencing Inequity:*** The proliferation of the use of mandatory minimum penalties, particularly at the federal level as a result of the “War on Drugs,” has had a significant impact on minority communities and fueled the country’s incarceration rates. Minorities comprise three-quarters of those serving a mandatory sentence for a federal drug trafficking offense, with African Americans making up 37% and Hispanics 34% of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ (BOP) population.

This failed sentencing policy has not only resulted in racial disparities within the federal bureau of prisons, it has also led to the BOP operating at 34% over its intended capacity, placing an overwhelming strain on BOP staffing and the DOJ’s budget. In order to address these issues, we must build on the bi-partisan momentum garnered in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress and, moving forward, push for sentencing reform legislation that specifically addresses front end drivers of mass incarceration that have led to overcrowding and overspending at the federal level.

***Felony Disenfranchisement:*** More than 700,000 people are released from prison and jails daily in this country. The widespread disenfranchisement of formerly incarcerated persons is contrary to our democratic principles, disproportionately impacts minorities, and is a barrier to a person’s successful reintegration back into society. Research has shown that formerly incarcerated individuals who vote are less likely to be rearrested. When people have fully and irreversibly served their time in prison, it is important that society restores their right to vote.

***Criminal Background Checks:*** The overbroad use of criminal background checks by employers to screen out job applicants has a disproportionate impact on minorities. Nationally, African Americans and Hispanics are arrested in numbers disproportionate to their representation in the general population. In 2010, African Americans made up 28 percent of all arrests, even though African Americans only comprised approximately 14 percent of the population. According to at least one survey, more than 90 percent of employers use criminal background checks to screen applicants for some or all positions.

In 2012, the EEOC adopted enforcement guidance that requires employers to conduct individualized assessments based on a list of criteria to determine if an applicant’s criminal record is job related. Despite this guidance, the Office of Personnel Management requires that applicants for a wide swath of government positions undergo criminal background checks.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** DOJ prioritizing implementation of its recently released Guidance for Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Regarding the Use of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, National Origin, Religion, Sexual Orientation, or Gender Identity. Where the revised policy wrongly omits the areas of national security, border integrity, and failure to apply to state and local enforcement, the administration should continue to work end profiling by all law enforcement.

**CHN supports** the Obama administration issuing an executive order that would prohibit federal law enforcement authorities from engaging in discriminatory profiling or sanctioning the use of

the practice by state and local law enforcement authorities in connection with any federal program.

**CHN supports** passage of a federal anti-racial profiling law.

**CHN supports** legislation that would require the reporting of information regarding the death of any person who is detained, arrested, en route to incarceration, or incarcerated in state or local facilities or a boot camp prison.

**CHN supports** the Obama administration rigorously investigating the disproportionate use of deadly force against individuals of color by state and local police, requiring law enforcement agencies to collect data disaggregated by race and encouraging police departments to reduce the use of deadly force.

**CHN supports** federal assessment of militarization of policing and safeguards to prevent the misuse of military style weapons.

**CHN supports** federal funding for body worn cameras and implicit and explicit bias training for state, local and federal law enforcement.

**CHN supports** legislation that significantly addresses front end drivers of mass incarceration, severe prison over-crowding, and over-criminalization. **CHN supports** the DOJ implementing training to reduce implicit and explicit racial bias, and encouraging criminal justice agencies at the state level to collect and evaluate data on racial outcomes at key decision making points in the justice system.

**CHN supports** passage of legislation that provides state and local governments and agencies with resources to support programs that assist formerly-incarcerated individuals with reentering the community. **CHN supports** the implementation of policies at the federal, state and local levels that support reentry and remove harmful barriers to basic necessities such as employment, housing, education and training, and income and nutrition assistance.

**CHN supports** Congress passing legislation that would restore voting rights in federal elections to disenfranchised individuals upon their release from incarceration. **CHN also supports** DOJ expanding its support of automatic restoration of voting rights to citizens upon their release from incarceration and opposes restrictions for those on parole or probation.

Further, **CHN supports** the government acting as a “model employer” and encouraging states to do the same with respect to the use of criminal background and credit checks when screening applicants for employment. Further, CHN supports legislation that would make background checks fair and accurate and would expand access to expungement and sealing of criminal records.

## Reclaiming Our Democracy

In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's disastrous decision in *Citizens United* in 2010, an unprecedented amount of money – much of it from secret sources – has flooded our elections, allowing corporations and wealthy individuals to purchase influence over our elected officials at the expense of the public interest. The Supreme Court's decision in *McCutcheon v. Federal Election* in April 2014 further empowered the wealthiest campaign donors at the expense of everyday Americans. Together, *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* mean that the wealthiest of donors have disproportionately more influence in the political process than average voters. More and more, this influx of money into the political system causes our elected officials to spend a significant amount of time dialing-for-dollars and raising money from deep-pocketed special interest donors rather than legislating and representing constituents.

As big money continues its stranglehold on our democracy, some politicians have simultaneously tried to make it more difficult for many people to vote, imposing onerous and strict photo identification laws that some federal courts have ruled are unconstitutionally discriminatory and akin to poll taxes. Other states have cut back opportunities to vote early and rolled back important laws like Election Day voter registration that are designed to bring more eligible citizens into the process. These restrictive voting laws disproportionately affect communities of color and the poor. Protecting voters from these laws became substantially more difficult when the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, overturned key components of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder* in June 2013.

If America is to fulfill its promise to all of its citizens, we need to commit to a democracy reform campaign in America that will bring together democracy reform organizations and organizations committed to social, economic, and social justice. When the wealthy and powerful are allowed to control who runs for office and who will be elected, our democratic system will fail to be a Republic of, for, and by the people. Such a system controlled by powerful special interests will promote and adopt policies that will benefit the privileged and wealthy at the expense of the vast number of Americans who deserve access to quality health care, education, and affordable housing.

And, in recent years, obstruction and abuse of the Senate's rules have stifled debate on an array of public policy matters. Due to the "secret hold" and other loopholes, senators are able to evade accountability when enabling obstruction.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** requiring full transparency of money in politics, including disclosure of the sources of funds for political campaign and lobbying expenditures and increasing accountability of corporate spending through shareholder oversight.

**CHN supports** ensuring that every eligible citizen can freely exercise their right to vote and have their vote counted; this includes efforts to strengthen components of the Voting Rights Act.



**CHN supports** creating a citizen-led campaign finance system that allows candidates to run effective and competitive campaigns using only small donations and limited public matching funds and requiring transparency of money in elections.

## Maintaining a Comprehensive National Framework for Measuring Economic Security and Hardship

Federal measures of economic security and hardship inform the public’s understanding of human needs and influence policy making. We must maintain and continuously improve the major surveys and other efforts that provide us with economic security and hardship data. To maintain and further improve the usefulness of these surveys, adequate funding without harmful restrictions is essential. Unfortunately, some existing data collection efforts have been targeted for elimination or deep cuts. In particular, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, an essential source of information on material hardship, benefit receipt, budget analysis, and historical trends, has been cut repeatedly in recent years, and is threatened with even deeper cuts in coming years.

It is also critical that our national statistical system provides a full and accurate picture of economic security and hardship in today’s United States, as well as the multiple dimensions of economic security and hardship, and the ways in which human needs are intertwined. The federal government has separate measures for various dimensions of economic security, including measures of unemployment produced by the Labor Department, statistics on income and health insurance produced by the Census Bureau, a measure of food insecurity developed by the Department of Agriculture, and some limited statistics on assets and debt. However, it lacks a comprehensive and integrated national statistical framework for measuring economic security overall.

The closest tool we have to a headline measure of basic income adequacy—the half-century-old official poverty measure (OPM)—has never been updated to account for increases in general living standards. As a result, those counted as poor today have living standards that are farther removed from typical families than was the case for poor families half a century ago. A “contemporary poverty line”—one that had kept pace with typical living standards -- would be at least \$34,000 today for a family of four, not \$23,000. The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) improves on the OPM in important ways— particularly by counting the Earned Income Tax Credit and several in-kind benefits, highlighting their effectiveness in reducing economic insecurity—but it fails to fully address this serious and longstanding problem.

To significantly improve our overall understanding of economic security and hardship, the following limitations of currently available measures should be addressed:

- The lack of family budget standards or other income standards that accurately reflect the economic resources families need to “make ends meet” at a modest, but adequate level for full participation in society. The federal government produced

such standards for three decades following World War II, but they were eliminated during the Reagan era budget cuts.

- The absence of a low-income measure that keeps pace over time with changes in typical living standard, as is done in most industrial nations.
- The lack of an adequate set of annual indicators of economic hardship—including direct measures of the full range of hardships families experience due to inadequate income, assets, and other resources.
- The lack of research at the federal level on multidimensional measures of poverty, economic security, and hardship. Low-income and vulnerable people themselves often describe their experience of poverty as involving more than low income. Multidimensional measures, such as the Oxford Multidimensional Poverty Index and the Opportunity Index, can incorporate a range of indicators and may better capture the lived reality of poverty.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a comprehensive and integrated statistical framework for measuring economic security and hardship that addresses these limitations. This framework should provide a full and accurate picture of the extent to which people with limited economic resources lack the goods and services that are broadly viewed as necessities of life in today's America. These modern necessities include not only food and housing, but health care, quality child care, the ability to save for education, retirement, and other precautionary purposes, transportation, access to the internet, and sufficient time (outside of work) to meet family and civic obligations and for recreation. The statistical indicators in this framework should provide accurate measures of economic security and hardship at both the national and state levels, and by various demographic characteristics, including race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.

**CHN supports** the development of family budget standards that accurately reflect the economic resources families need to live at a modest, but adequate level. These standards should be updated annually in a way that keeps pace with increases in mainstream living standards. They should also take into account important factors like disability. Any state or local adjustments to standards should take into account regional differences in public infrastructure and services, particularly ones related to transportation infrastructure, and be generally consistent with geographic differences in overall material hardship. As an initial step, **CHN supports** the federal government's production of annual low-income data on the share of the population living below two-thirds or some other fraction of the national median income (equivalized for family size).

**CHN supports** increased investment in publicly available data to measure economic security and social progress at the national, state, and local levels. Annual appropriations bills must include sufficient funds for the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Economic Analysis and other statistical programs within the federal government. **CHN supports** adequate funding for the decennial census, American Community Survey (ACS), the Current Population Survey (CPS), the Survey for Income and Program Participation (SIPP), and other important surveys of economic and social well-being. Finally, sufficient resources should be provided to enhance the collection and reporting of data by race, ethnicity, primary language,

and disability. **CHN supports** efforts to consolidate and improve data collection, management, and disclosure where possible and desirable, and that improve the functionality of Data.gov by integrating statistical information and providing useful analytical tools to the public.

**CHN supports** adding questions about sexual orientation and gender identity to federal surveys to improve public policy and help reduce inequities that sexual and gender minorities face. A collaboration of LGBT organizations and researchers, including experts from The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law and the Center for American Progress, has published best practice documents related to asking these questions. These documents provide culturally-competent and scientifically sound methods for including these questions into multiple survey types, and address concerns about disclosure and maintaining the confidentiality of these data.

## Implementing Existing Federal Policies

CHN recognizes that enacting legislation is only one step in the policy process. To turn policy into practice, federal agencies must issue implementing regulations and guidance, make grants, enforce laws and regulations, provide leadership and technical assistance, and waive or revise regulations as needed. Particularly at a time when legislative action is constrained by divided government, administrative action may present a significant opportunity to improve the delivery of programs for low-income individuals and families and the enforcement of worker and consumer protections.

The administration of many large entitlement programs is “inherently governmental” and therefore is solely provided by governmental agencies. Some other programs are implemented through competitive grants and it is important that organizations serving low-income populations are aware of these funding opportunities and how to compete for them. To maximize scarce resources, it is also important that the federal government periodically assess the efficacy of these programs, highlight best practices, and assist potential grantees in gaining the tools necessary to write a successful application.

CHN will work with its members and partners to identify opportunities to influence the development of regulations and guidance at both the federal and state levels to protect the interests of low-income and other vulnerable populations. In 2015-2016, agencies will be issuing regulations to implement significant reauthorizations enacted in 2014, including the Farm Bill, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** effective enforcement of laws that protect workers and consumers. **CHN supports** efforts to improve the quality of jobs by applying standards and protections to workers employed by government agencies and contractors. In the absence of congressional action to establish comprehensive immigration reform, **CHN supports** administrative action to remove the threat of deportation, keep families intact and provide work authorization to vulnerable immigrants. For this program to work, it must be financially

accessible to all eligible individuals and their families.

Many low-income and vulnerable populations are served by multiple programs, administered by different agencies and/or at different levels of government. The services provided by these programs are often uncoordinated with each other. Some individuals fail to receive the full package of benefits that they need to succeed, while others must navigate confusing and sometimes contradictory program requirements in order to access services.

**CHN supports** cross-agency federal efforts to integrate systems and share data in order to develop client-centric systems that are coordinated and responsive to client needs regardless of funding source. **CHN supports** the use of program options and waiver authority to improve service delivery and program effectiveness. **CHN supports** the collection and reporting of both financial and outcome data as part of the waiver process in order to improve our understanding of effective programs and the resources they deliver. **CHN opposes** the use of waivers to bypass essential protections, including public administration necessary to protect the integrity of core functions, or reduce benefits or services for low-income populations.

In 2015-2016, the ongoing implementation of the Affordable Care Act provides an unprecedented opportunity to expand health insurance coverage to millions of low-income individuals and families. However, this opportunity will only become reality if states adopt processes that minimize the burden of applying for and receiving health insurance.

**CHN supports** the federal government providing clear and consistent leadership to ensure that eligibility requirements and application processes are simplified and coordinated and that applications are written to encourage seamless enrollment of eligible individuals and use language accessible for a broad range of populations. **CHN supports** the federal government providing the maximum encouragement to states to “horizontally integrate” other human services programs into the eligibility systems being developed under the ACA, including the extension of the waiver of cost allocation across programs, and assisting in the removal of unnecessary barriers to such integration.

---