



**Public Policy Priorities**  
Calendar Years 2017 – 2018

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## **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.

CHN recognizes that in a time of unprecedented threats and unpredictable opportunities affecting vulnerable people and the services they need, it may be necessary to shift staff resources and coalition focus to issues not now addressed within the Leadership Issues below. Decisions to shift resources will be made based on the significance of the impact on low-income and vulnerable populations, including immigrants, communities of color, people with disabilities, children and seniors.

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

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

Americans have a right to expect that their federal government will ensure opportunity and security for our people. Over the decades since the Great Depression, we have learned that economic opportunity and security are intertwined. Poverty has been reduced by about 40 percent since the 1960s when counting basic aid such as SNAP/food stamps, low-income tax credits, Social Security, and SSI. Medicaid, Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Affordable Care Act have provided health security to many millions. These gains improve the lives of those who directly benefit, and spur broadly shared economic growth.

Using the federal budget as a plan to meet needs will enable sustained economic growth that reaches all Americans. The federal budget can and should provide the funding needed to make these investments, paid for by a responsible combination of revenues, savings, and borrowing. We are fortunate to be a wealthy nation well able to afford to promote the general welfare. But whether easy or hard, our founders recognized that goal as essential to our national purpose.

**Safety Net Programs are Essential to Our Economic Security.** The federal role is needed because it is charged with protecting vulnerable people and expanding opportunity for all,

recognizing that our nation is only as strong as our people. Government is needed to do things that the private economy will not. Government can ensure that all people have the building blocks of a decent life: health care, lifelong education, opportunities to work in good jobs with adequate wages and work/family balance, cash income to low-income seniors in retirement and to the jobless in hard times, and affordable necessities, including food, housing, and caregiving for children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

**Counter-cyclical Programs Must be Protected and Strengthened.** Federal programs that ensure benefits to qualifying individuals in good times and bad are essential to our success in promoting opportunity and security. SNAP is a successful program because it responds to growing need in times of high unemployment, and is made even more successful when benefits increase to more closely reflect the cost of putting food on the table. Medicaid's open-ended structure is similarly vital. If these programs could no longer grow in response to rising need, recessions would hit harder and last longer.

The federal government ensures that we are one nation, with all eligible people able to receive certain benefits, services and protections, whether they come from poor or rich states, without regard to race, gender, ethnicity or religion. It is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that all of us can contribute to economic progress and all of us can benefit from it. When the federal role is too weak, we get rising inequality, recessions and depressions.

Protecting federal programs that ensure economic security is a central goal of the Coalition on Human Needs. We join with millions of Americans who are determined to preserve and expand Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, SNAP/food stamps, unemployment insurance, and Supplemental Security Income. When these programs are assured the funding they need to be responsive, they protect people who cannot work and build a foundation to make it easier for workers to return to the workforce.

**The Federal Budget Must Support Opportunity and Security.** An overwhelming majority of American voters believes that the federal government has an important role to play in investing in our future. Just after the 2016 election, 88 percent of Trump voters and 87 percent of Clinton voters voiced support for a \$1 trillion plan that would rebuild physical infrastructure and invest in human infrastructure "to help workers with good jobs that pay decent wages, affordable education, and child care support," according to a [poll](#) conducted by GBA Strategies and the Center for American Progress.

Decisions about federal investments should be made through the federal budget process. The President's budget and later Congressional versions should start with an assessment of unmet need. Crumbling public housing, roads, bridges and public transit, lack of adequate health coverage or proper nutrition, not enough effective education from preschool through lifelong learning, too few trained and adequately compensated caregivers, lack of addiction treatment – these are just some of the needs that cannot be met without federal participation.

Making these investments will require federal spending caps to be lifted. Under existing caps,

domestic discretionary spending dropped to 3.3 percent of GDP in 2016, according to the Congressional Budget Office, just shy of a record low over more than 50 years. We cannot fund the education, child care, transportation, housing, public health, energy and environmental improvements the nation needs at these levels.

Nor should we replace these spending caps with 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.

It is important to note that the big areas of increasing costs in the federal budget are Social Security and Medicare, because of the aging of the baby boomers, and interest on the debt. All other federal spending (discretionary and mandatory) will decline as a share of GDP through 2025.

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 spurred 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. In December 2016, the *Washington Post* reported that the Pentagon buried an internal study that exposed *\$125 billion* over five years in administrative waste in its budget operations. The Administration and Congress should make it a top priority to eliminate this waste and redirect funding towards critically important domestic priorities.

With interest rates extremely low, there could not be a better time for federal investments in all the 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.

For some years, the federal budget process has been broken by an unbalanced insistence on program cuts as a means of deficit reduction, while allowing corporate and high-income individual tax reduction and avoidance. The gap between needs and resources has repeatedly stymied agreement on budget resolutions and enactment of appropriations bills. Any attempt to “reform” federal budgeting without starting from the premise that basic needs must not go unmet is doomed to fail. Even if only simple majorities in the House and Senate are sufficient to pass draconian budgets, public rejection of the consequences will eventually take hold, but most likely not before serious damage is inflicted.

**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** raising spending caps and ending the sequestration cuts governing domestic discretionary spending now scheduled to return starting in FY 2018, in order to meet needs and make investments as described above. Caps on domestic and international appropriations have reduced spending in these areas to 3.3 percent of GDP in 2016, down from a 50-year average closer to 4 percent. Maintaining the caps will reduce their share of GDP to only 3.0 percent in 2018. To the extent that caps on discretionary spending are maintained, **CHN supports** separate caps for and parity between domestic/international and defense expenditures, and **opposes** the use of Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding to pay for regular operations of the Defense Department, thereby evading budget caps.

**CHN supports** the continued exemption of mandatory programs such as Social Security, Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, SSI and others, from budget caps or similar restrictions. These programs have been exempted because they provide essential services, with special attention to the needs of low-income and vulnerable people, including children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

**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. Tax expenditures, which exceeded \$1.2 trillion in 2015, must be subject to this assessment, along with Pentagon and domestic expenditures. Spending through the tax code is not only costly but also skewed to deliver its benefits disproportionately to people with the highest incomes. The top 20 percent by income received more than half of all tax expenditures in 2013; the lowest 20 percent received only 7.7 percent, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Military spending has increased by 50 percent since 2001, while domestic and international appropriations grew by just 13.5 percent over the same period, according to the National Priorities Project. If the additional annual sequestration cuts were to resume through 2021, the Pentagon will still have more funding in real terms than it spent at the height of the Cold War. The U.S. spends almost as much on its military than the next 14 countries combined and substantial Pentagon budget reductions are possible with no sacrifice to U.S. security; in fact, reducing wasteful and ineffective military spending will lead to improved national and economic security for our nation. Support for military spending reductions has spread across the political spectrum. Other expenditures such as agricultural subsidies or private contractor 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** the continued incorporation of inflation adjustments in projecting baseline costs of programs. The Congressional Budget Office includes the effects of inflation in order to show the cost of maintaining current service levels. Failure to do so would create the false

impression that flat funding would cover the same amount of services as in the previous year, and would worsen current trends of disinvestment in domestic needs.

**CHN supports** the use of emergency spending outside budget caps to meet urgent, unanticipated, threatening and temporary needs. Public health emergencies such as the lead poisoning of Flint, Michigan's children due to reckless decisions by public officials, as well as natural disasters and disease outbreaks should all be addressed outside budget caps.

**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. 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, taking into account the impact of deficit reduction measures on disparate income groups and protecting low-income people from harmful cuts in services.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** restrictive structural changes such as block grants, per capita caps or vouchers, as well as dollar cuts in critical human needs programs that would hamper their effectiveness or their ability to serve eligible families and individuals, in essential entitlement programs including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), unemployment insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). CHN opposes waivers that would undermine the individual entitlement to benefits. **CHN opposes** offsetting cuts in one priority program to pay for another.

**CHN opposes** the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which has provided health insurance to 20 million Americans and improved coverage for millions more, while making savings in overall health care costs that have already contributed to a reduction in long-range deficit trends. A good faith effort should seek improvements in the ACA without dismantling it. Proposals that would repeal the ACA with no specified plan for replacing it are even more grossly irresponsible and should be rejected.

**CHN opposes** the use of reconciliation instructions intended to force cuts or restrictions in basic safety net programs, and **opposes** fast-track procedures for terminating programs or converting safety net entitlement programs to discretionary appropriations.

**CHN opposes** budget enforcement procedures that are limited to across-the-board spending cuts without requiring revenue increases and/or reductions in tax expenditures, as well as 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. Economists across the ideological spectrum agree that its use is more a political tool than a reasoned assessment of policy.

**CHN opposes** constitutional amendments to require a balanced budget.

## Promoting a Progressive Tax Code That Raises Adequate Revenues and Reduces Poverty

Over the past several decades, our tax system has become rigged in favor of the wealthy and corporations, while leaving average Americans picking up the tab. Tax breaks and loopholes favoring the rich are starving our country of the revenue needed to make the critical public investments to protect the most vulnerable in our society and ensure opportunity for everyone. This must change.

We need a tax system built on the principles of fairness and adequacy. This means that any tax reform effort should make our tax system more progressive and raise a substantial amount of additional revenue from our country's wealthiest individuals and corporations.

Major budget and tax issues will be hotly debated in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. Comprehensive tax reform is at the top of the agenda for lawmakers. Unfortunately, many in Congress are looking to expand existing and create new loopholes to benefit the wealthy and corporations under the guise of so-called "tax reform." If tax reform moves forward, it should generate significant long term revenues, not make the system even more favorable to special interests.

The next Congress also presents a unique bipartisan opportunity to expand the role of the tax system in helping low-income individuals and families out of poverty. Democrats and Republicans alike have supported proposals to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to all workers and expand the Child Tax Credit, proposals that if passed could expand opportunity to those in need.

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 (CHN) supports** tax policies that raise adequate revenues in a progressive manner, including credits that help struggling families.

**CHN supports** closing the gap in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) so that no low-wage worker is taxed into poverty. Congress should expand the EITC for low-wage workers not raising children in their home, including extending the credit to young workers starting at age 21, to young adults who age out of foster care at 18 and to workers above the age of 64. This group is the lone group of workers who are taxed into poverty, in part because they receive little to no EITC. According to an estimate from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, this would help over 16 million working Americans, lifting many of them out of poverty. Expanding the EITC benefits a diverse group of workers, including working parents who don't live under the same roof as their kids but still want to provide for them; veterans and members of the military; and young workers just starting out whose low wages barely cover the costs of food and rent.



**CHN supports** strengthening the Child Tax Credit for young children living in poverty. The Child Tax Credit (CTC) is aimed at helping parents do the best for their children, but very poor families who most need it get only a partial credit or none at all. Congress should address this by making the credit fully refundable starting with the first dollar of earnings, and by phasing it in at a much more rapid rate.

**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. Multinational corporations should not be allowed to avoid hundreds of billions in taxes that they owe by shifting their profits into offshore tax havens.

**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. As written, many of the largest tax breaks in our code are upside-down, meaning they provide greater benefits to the wealthy over low- and middle-income families. Such tax breaks should be reformed and turned right-side up so that they better target those in need. Refundable credits are strongly preferable to deductions, which always benefit those in higher tax brackets more.

**CHN supports** taxing income from investments (such as capital gains and dividends income) at the same rate as income from work (ordinary income). There is no reason why wealthy investors like Warren Buffet should be paying a lower tax rate than many middle-income Americans.

**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** 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. The estate tax should be restored to its role as a critical bulwark against the increasing consolidation of wealth in the United States.

**CHN supports** repealing the loophole that allows a substantial portion of capital gains income to never be taxed if it is passed on as part of an estate. This is yet another way wealthy investors are able to escape taxation.

**CHN supports** legislative actions that prevent corporations from pretending to be foreign companies for tax purposes (a practice known as “corporate inversions.”) If Congress refuses to act, the Treasury Department should use every administrative tool lawfully available to raise revenue and make our tax system fairer.

**CHN supports** rebalancing federal housing resources to help low-income families to thrive in stable, affordable homes in safe communities. Most federal housing tax incentives now benefit

families with relatively little need for assistance because they are focused on home ownership, with more than 75 percent of federal housing expenditures going to the top fifth of households by income.

**CHN supports** the establishment of a tax credit to help make housing affordable for renters with the lowest incomes. Our nation has long provided tax relief for higher income homeowners, most of whom would be stably housed without assistance. A renters' tax credit that could help ensure that the lowest income households are able to afford a safe, decent home is long overdue.

**CHN supports** an expansion of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit tied to reforms that make it more feasible to serve more low-income and extremely low-income, homeless, rural, and Native American populations.

**CHN supports** making the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) refundable. This crucial reform would allow many low-income working families to claim the credit for the first time. Child care is a major expense for working families and consumes a larger share of the budgets of lower-income families. The current CDCTC provides limited benefits to low-income families because it is not refundable.

**CHN supports** increasing IRS funding so that the agency has adequate federal appropriations to strengthen and increase enforcement activities. After years of foolish budget cuts, the IRS has been unable to ensure that the wealthy and corporations are paying what they legally owe.

**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** Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) eligibility for tax credits designed to help working immigrant families support their children and pay for college. 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.

**CHN supports** addressing abuses separately if overall tax reform is not possible in the next year. Reforms that would raise revenue and make our tax system more fair now should not be held hostage year after year to the hope of a comprehensive reform package.

**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. It is outrageous that many lawmakers require that every penny of public investments be paid for by cutting programs, while at the same time they pass unpaid-for corporate tax breaks year after year.

**CHN opposes** cutting funding for human needs programs to pay for any tax expenditures, including refundable tax credits such as EITC and CTC. Given the challenges many face in America, there is no reason additional help for some individuals should have to come at the cost of cuts for others in need.

## **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**:

## **Promoting High-Quality, Affordable Health Coverage for Everyone**

As a result of the Affordable Care Act, the uninsured rate has dropped steeply. Nearly 28 million people are estimated to have coverage as a result of the law, either through Medicaid or through the private insurance marketplaces the law established. Most of these people, according to a Commonwealth Fund survey, have been able to visit a health care provider or fill a prescription when they would not have been able to do so prior to being covered by Medicaid or a marketplace plan.

“While the progress made so far is undeniable, the coverage gains and benefit improvements the ACA has produced are now in serious peril. House and Senate majority leadership, as well as President-elect Trump, have vowed to repeal the law. Some want to reach beyond the ACA to undermine other health coverage programs, for example by cutting Medicare and Medicaid and shifting more health care costs onto consumers or states. Some policy makers have proposed turning Medicaid into a block grant or imposing a “per capita cap” on the program, which would cap federal funding for state Medicaid programs by limiting it to a fixed amount in order to deeply cut federal Medicaid spending, with the cuts growing larger over time. In any scenario, this mean that states would either have to increase their own funding for Medicaid or, more likely, shift significant costs to beneficiaries and health care providers. Some are also

proposing to convert Medicare into a “voucher” program, which would gut this bedrock health insurance program, end Medicare’s guarantee of coverage, and cap coverage at the value of the voucher in order to substantially reduce federal spending. Seniors and individuals with disabilities would face much higher out-of-pocket costs, driving many into poverty and those already in poverty into deeper deprivation, and going without needed care.

Rather than eliminating the ACA, or making even broader cuts to health care programs that are critically important to individuals and families with low incomes, policy makers should build upon the progress that has already been made. Efforts should seek to expand coverage to more of the estimated 12.7 percent of working-age adults who lack it, including many racial and ethnic minorities, immigrant families, and low-income people living in states that did not adopt the ACA Medicaid expansion.

There is a strong link between health and financial outcomes. Including financial capability services in health programs, such as community health centers, can benefit both the health and financial well-being of vulnerable communities.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** guaranteed affordable and high-quality health care for every person. **CHN supports** maintaining 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 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 multi-year extension of the Children’s Health Insurance Program and funding that is sufficient for states to both maintain and modestly expand coverage of children. **CHN supports** increased funding for integrating financial capability services into community health centers to improve the financial well-being of vulnerable populations.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** restricting the availability of coverage and care for moderate- and low-income people. **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, and particularly any attempt to repeal the ACA without simultaneously enacting new legislation to provide 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. **CHN opposes** restricting the availability of coverage and care for immigrants, unnecessary documentation requirements, and any other barriers to health care for citizens and eligible immigrants.

## The Epidemic of Addiction and Substance Use Disorder

The heroin, opioids, and other drugs epidemic is devastating individuals, families and communities of all income levels, cultural backgrounds, education levels, ages, genders, and religious/non-religious affiliations. In much the same ways that low-income people are stigmatized and blamed for being poor, so are people who suffer from substance use disorder (addiction). As CHN works to remove the stigmas and misperceptions about poverty, so will CHN work to remove the stigma of addiction by recognizing the neuroscience findings that substance use disorder is a disease, not a moral failing.

The statistics are beyond alarming. The 2016 "Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health" finds that 20.8 million people ages 12 or older had a substance use disorder in 2015. And, 66.7 million people report binge drinking in the past month, and 48 million said they used an illicit drug or misused prescription drugs in the past year.

Opioids and other drugs are major determinants of increased school dropout rates, incarceration rates, foster care placements, family violence and dysfunction, poor nutrition, pre-natal substance-exposed babies, and crime and delinquency. Drugs and alcohol have long-term negative effects on the adolescent brain.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** all efforts to de-stigmatize addiction and substance use disorder. **CHN supports** federal funding for grants that emphasize evidence-based, trauma-informed programs and approaches for prevention, treatment and recovery programs. **CHN supports** continued and expanded research funding by the National Institutes of Health and other related federal agencies, including the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

## Restoring Opportunity and Shared Prosperity

America needs a comprehensive economic plan that will put people back to work, raise wages and support those for whom jobs aren't available or do not pay sufficiently to support their families.

**Jobs:** Employment is a central component of economic growth. While the overall unemployment rate at this writing is below 5 percent, the unemployment rate for African-Americans is 8.5 percent as compared to 4.4 percent for Whites. And, while the employment-

to-population ratio has improved modestly from the Great Recession lows, it is still not at the pre-recession level. Finally, wages are showing signs of only very modest growth – between September 2015 and September 2016, real hourly wages (after taking inflation into account) grew by just 1 percent. (All data from DOL’s Bureau of Labor Statistics) Much more needs to be done to address jobs and wages going forward.

***Economic Insecurity and Inequality:*** Economic security has been declining for most Americans for decades. Living standards and quality of life have deteriorated, as families only managed to prevent real incomes from falling by adding work hours. When earnings cannot cover regular expenses, families have increased debt. In the current, post-Great Recession era, 42 percent of U.S. workers make less than \$15 per hour. At the same time, the top 1 percent have received 85.1 percent of the total growth in income between 2009 and 2013, which has led to unprecedented income inequality among Americans. Retirement security has also taken a hit, largely due to the precipitous decline in defined benefit retirement plans, lost savings and reduced home values during the Great Recession.

According to the most recent census data, the poverty rate in the U.S. declined in 2015 to 14.7 percent of the population, compared with 15.5 percent in 2014. This poverty rate remains unacceptably high, however, especially for African-Americans whose poverty rate is 24 percent, and for the 21 percent of Hispanics who are living in poverty. Women are 35 percent more likely to live in poverty than men. And, one out of five children still live in poverty.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** increased, robust funding to states and localities for infrastructure projects, public housing and schools, roads and public transit, public health, and public safety that will put people to work and improve the quality of life for all Americans. **The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** any infrastructure initiatives that serve to enrich private companies while shifting the costs to the general public.

Job creation initiatives should provide jobs for low-income people who are at risk of unemployment and under-employment, such as minorities, ex-offenders, youth, people with disabilities, and workers over age 50. Efforts should also be targeted to disadvantaged communities. Federal initiatives 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. Job creation initiatives should employ effective strategies including apprenticeships and on-the-job training to prepare workers both for the first job and for subsequent moves up the career ladder. Any financial incentives provided to businesses must be inextricably linked to additional hiring for good jobs.

**CHN supports** federal aid to encourage states and localities to create temporary jobs targeted to providing 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 to 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. **CHN supports** enhanced funding for intensive and personalized reemployment services to link workers with training opportunities, to assist them in their job search, and to help employers find workers to fill job vacancies.

**CHN supports** a strong safety net for those who are unable to find work, or who are poor even though they are working. **CHN opposes** any attempts to weaken safety net programs through block granting of such programs, punitive work requirements or arbitrary time limits on benefit receipt.

**CHN supports** robust work and training opportunities, as well as robust labor exchange programs, 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.

## 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 percent of all workers – 35.2 percent of public employees and just 6.7 percent 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 \$980, compared to \$770 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 to so-called "right to work" laws in several states that allow public sector workers to benefit from union representation without contributing to pay for the cost of that representation. And, inherently governmental public sector jobs continue to be privatized, with the resulting loss of union protections, wages 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, union representation, and unemployment insurance benefits. Approximately \$3 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 as misclassification lowers labor costs by as much as 40 percent.

Ironically, employers continue to blatantly discriminate in hiring against the unemployed. 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, which 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. Under the Trump Administration, we foresee even greater vulnerability, including employer threats of deportation, for immigrant workers.

The Obama Administration revitalized the federal agencies 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 have serious concerns that the Trump Administration will reverse these important gains and instead appoint leaders to these agencies who are anti-worker and who will not 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** unions' rights to receive non-member fees, in addition to member dues, so that all employees who benefit from union representation are contributing to the cost of that representation.



**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.

**CHN supports** the continuation of 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.

**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, including in the courts, that would weaken public sector unions by prohibiting them from collecting fees from nonmembers. **CHN opposes** any efforts to roll back legal protections and agency enforcement efforts addressing pregnancy discrimination. **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.

## **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 postsecondary education and training that provide paths to family-supporting jobs and careers in today's economy. Among those most affected by the slow recovery in the labor market 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. As states and local areas implement the Workforce Innovation and Investment Act (WIOA) of 2014, federal policy should continue to support their efforts to develop seamless career pathways among 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 of tuition, fees, and living expenses, or forced to take on crushing student loan debt.

Adult Education and workforce programs authorized under WIOA have been severely underfunded, leaving them hard pressed to address the needs of workers and employers, especially given WIOA's increased emphasis on aiding individuals with barriers to employment and the law's requirement that individuals receiving public assistance and those with low incomes or basic skills deficiencies must receive priority for Title I-Adult services. 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 opportunities 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. Title I Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker programs need additional funds to invest in high quality education and training, and local workforce boards need to build capacity to convene career pathway and industry partnerships in their regions. Title IV vocational rehabilitation service providers need funding, guidance, policies, and strategies to prioritize federal investments for Competitive Integrated Employment to serve more Title IV recipients.

**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 providing training for nontraditional occupations or those in which one gender is less than 25 percent 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** 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; building robust career pathway programs that include integrated education and training strategies along with comprehensive support services; 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, lower-skilled individuals.

**CHN supports** changes to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work participation rate (WPR) that give states credit for engaging clients in education and training and barrier removal activities, and that allow states to align TANF with workforce programs.

**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.

## **Improving Job Quality and Meeting Family Responsibilities**

Too often, 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.

Despite some improvement in recent years, there are nearly 9 million U.S. workers who fall below the poverty line. Although employment has significant poverty reducing effects, the steep erosion of wage standards means that work is often not enough. 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 percent 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 federal minimum wage increase to \$7.25 per hour in 2007-2009 provide evidence to this end; it 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. One reason income is low is that too many workers have not been compensated for hours they work overtime. New rules, assuming they survive legal challenges, modernize overtime rules and 4.2 million workers around the nation will see take home pay rise.

Job quality extends beyond wages. Paid leave is an essential support for workers balancing obligations at home and on the job. But in the U.S., no federal law sets standards enabling 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 40 jurisdictions including seven states (Arizona, Connecticut, California, Oregon, Massachusetts, Vermont and Washington) that have 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 four states – California, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island – workers have access to paid family leave insurance programs, which provide partial wage replacement for between 4 and 6 weeks. Both paid sick days and paid family and medical leave bills are active in many states and localities around the country.

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 eligible for 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 32 percent of civilian workers – and 72 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. Laws in Vermont, San Francisco, and New Hampshire give some workers a right to request changes in their schedules, including increased stability, predictability, and shifts that fit with other obligations, with legal protection from employer retaliation. The cities of San Francisco and Seattle have passed comprehensive fair scheduling laws aimed at improving conditions for some retail and restaurant workers. Numerous other jurisdictions have fair scheduling bills under consideration.

While some workers meet responsibilities at home by taking on part-time work, 6 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, healthy and safe workplaces, equal opportunity and equal treatment. It is vital that the final regulations effective December 1, 2016, which modernized our nation's overtime coverage, are allowed by the courts to proceed and stay in force. **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 competitive grants to states which enabled them to evaluate paid family leave programs for their states. 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 (for part-time workers) to receive access to available 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.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** rescinding President Obama's Executive Order that requires government contractors to provide paid sick days to employees. This Order ensures that taxpayer dollars are spent to help deter unnecessary contagion, among other health benefits.

## Restoring and Strengthening the Federal-State Unemployment Insurance System

Unemployment is one of the most common economic risks that households will face, with two in three workers experiencing at least a year of joblessness for themselves or their household head during their working years. By providing partial wage replacement and access to reemployment services, the federal-state unemployment insurance (UI) system helps involuntarily unemployed workers and their families stay afloat until new work is found. Most states provide up to six months of benefits to workers, with the federal government funding additional weeks during recessions. By reducing the drop in spending in households

experiencing unemployment, UI boosts general economic activity during economic downturns, which helps preserve jobs.

UI was a critical source of support to workers and their families during the Great Recession, the most severe recession since the 1930s, when up to 12.4 percent of families had an unemployed person. According to an analysis from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, UI prevented an estimated five million people from falling into poverty in 2009 alone and an estimated 1.4 million home foreclosures between 2008 and 2012. Provision of regular state and federal UI closed nearly one-fifth of the gap in real GDP between 2008 and 2010.

The Great Recession created unprecedented financing challenges for state UI programs, however, and rather than enacting responsible financing reforms, state legislatures have leaned heavily on benefit reductions, ensuring that fewer unemployed jobseekers will be protected by UI in the future. As of late-2016, nine states had maximum benefit durations below the conventional 26 weeks, including four that paid fewer than 15 weeks.

At the same time, the UI system has failed to keep pace with important changes in families and the U.S. workforce. Workers are more vulnerable to permanent layoffs that could lead to involuntary part-time work or long-term unemployment. Women are nearly half the workforce, and their earnings are the primary source of family income in many cases. Yet, conditions that typically characterize women's employment—including working part time or leaving a job for compelling reasons, such as to care for family—are not recognized by many states.

A record low 27 percent of the unemployed received UI in 2014 and 2015. The UI system's erosion not only harms working families, but it leaves our economy more vulnerable in the event of a recession. If UI is to remain relevant to working people and the economy, then Congress must take immediate steps towards restoring and strengthening certain core program features and vital services.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** strong state UI programs that reflect the needs of today's working families. Congress must require states to provide up to 26 weeks of regular UI benefits, which, in an economy of rising unemployment durations, would provide jobseekers, especially lower-wage jobseekers, with enough time to find suitable new employment, without significantly impacting aggregate unemployment. Further, in recognition of the prominent role of part-time work in the U.S. economy, especially in large service-providing industries, Congress must ensure that part-time workers are eligible in all states. **CHN supports** federal "non-reduction" provisions prohibiting states from enacting offsetting reductions to regular state benefits during periods in which federal benefits for long-term claimants are activated—including reductions to benefit amounts and maximum potential durations.

**CHN supports** an adequately funded UI system, to ensure it can continue meeting its goals of stabilizing the economy and households during difficult times without harsh benefits cuts that harm working families. As a first step, Congress must raise the portion of annual earnings

subject to federal UI taxation, known as the taxable wage base, which at \$7,000, is highly regressive. Recent policy reform proposals have put forward levels ranging from one-third to one-half of the Social Security taxable wage base. Notably, this would cause state wage bases to rise automatically.

**CHN supports** fair access to state UI programs, supported by full federal funding of program administration, and strong enforcement of applicable federal standards, to ensure state claims-filing processes can be easily understood and accomplished by most workers, including workers with literacy challenges, workers with limited English proficiency, older workers, and disabled workers.

**CHN supports** federal investments in layoff aversion strategies like short-time compensation, also known as work sharing, which lets firms reduce work hours as an alternative to layoffs during temporary downturns. UI benefits supplement worker earnings until conditions recover.

**CHN supports** a revitalized Employment Service, which provides cost-effective job-search assistance to jobseekers, including UI claimants, and greater investment in Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments, or RESEA, for UI claimants, especially those identified as the most likely to become long-term unemployed.

**CHN supports** reforms to the Extended Benefits (EB) program, the permanent federal-state program that extends the benefit duration of claimants who exhaust their regular state benefits during recessions. To ensure EB ramps up swiftly during difficult times, state activation criteria, also known as “triggers,” should be based on state unemployment rates, rather than insured unemployment rates, which are stricter; and payments should be fully federally funded, as state trust fund reserves usually are low or depleted during recessions.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** proposals that would grant states waivers of important federal UI requirements, for such purposes as diverting scarce UI trust fund dollars to conduct demonstration projects that allege to facilitate the reemployment of a state’s UI recipients but that condition UI receipt on factors unrelated to substantive eligibility; or to defy federal UI administrative standards, first established to ensure the prompt payment of benefits to eligible jobless workers. Current federal UI law grants states broad authority to define UI eligibility rules and disqualification penalties. In addition, many states demonstrated during the Great Recession that they have the capability and resources under existing federal UI law to employ strategies that help facilitate reemployment.

**CHN opposes** any proposals generally that would condition UI eligibility on factors unrelated to the “fact or cause of [a] worker’s unemployment,” as currently defined in federal UI law. This includes any additional proposals requiring UI claimants to pass a drug test as a condition of eligibility. A significant number of states appropriately penalize job loss connected to drug use or to a failed drug test, by explicitly denying benefits under these circumstances. In addition, federal law currently permits states to conduct drug testing as a condition of initial



UI eligibility if an individual was discharged for unlawful drug use, or if the only suitable work available to an individual is in an occupation that regularly conducts drug testing.

**CHN opposes** any proposals that draw UI eligibility distinctions based on individual earnings. Involuntary job loss and long-term unemployment impose a wide range of material and personal hardships, and it would be incorrect to presume that even the highest-wage earners are immune to these outcomes.

## Protecting Immigrants and Promoting Fair Immigration Policy

Protecting the rights of immigrants living in the United States and reforming our failed immigration system are moral and economic imperatives. Proposals to build a wall at the southern border and deport millions of immigrants are unfeasible and would result in tearing apart families and devastating our economy and our communities. Moreover, a massive immigrant enforcement initiative would cost billions upon billions of dollars, funds which should instead be directed to lifting American families out of poverty and promoting economic security for *all* Americans.

There are 11.1 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 unsurprising that non-citizens including Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs), various visa categories, and the undocumented make up a disproportionate share of the nation's poor.

In June 2012, President Obama exercised his legal authority to create the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program so that young undocumented residents who arrived to the U.S. as children can live and legally work in the U.S. without the threat of deportation and family separation. To date, over 740,000 young immigrants have been granted DACA status and have had the opportunity to pursue careers while being free of the constant threat of being torn away from their homes and families. However, the DACA program is in jeopardy of being eliminated, and these young people are now living in fear of deportation.

Furthermore, the refugee crisis is larger than at any point since World War II. The U.S. has been a world leader in resettling refugees over the last 70 years, but the U.S. refugee resettlement program is under attack. Current law forbids returning individuals to a country where they would be at risk of torture or persecuted on account of their race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group. Undermining the U.S. refugee program would undermine our shared values and historical commitment to serving as a beacon of liberty.

Looking forward, 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, as non-citizens have nearly twice the poverty rate of naturalized citizens according to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, 2015 and 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

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

**CHN supports** Congress providing access to supports that will help immigrants integrate into the fabric of our communities. This should include policies that harness the skills of immigrant workers and allow them to develop their full potential, including expanding immigrants' access to adult education and workforce development programs, English language acquisition programs, and dual generation programs.

**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, regardless of immigration status. **CHN supports** the continuation of federal policies by both immigration and labor law enforcement agencies that prevent unscrupulous employers from exploiting immigration status to deter employees from asserting their rights on the job.

**CHN supports** the U.S. commitment to welcoming refugees who are fleeing persecution and

imminent danger as a reflection of our moral and national values.

**CHN supports** policies that build trust between local law enforcement and all community members to ensure public safety. Separating local policing from federal immigration enforcement promotes the safety of the whole community. Forcing local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration law does not make communities any safer and inhibits victims and witnesses of crimes from coming forward as they fear retribution or separation from their families.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** policies that divide families, including separating children from parents and other actions that have a divisive or harmful effect on immigrant communities and that foster restricted access to services for eligible beneficiaries.

**CHN opposes** threats to the DACA program, which is protecting over 740,000 young immigrants from deportation who have made important contributions to their communities and the economy.

**CHN opposes** policies that divide families, including separating children from parents and other actions that have a divisive or harmful effect on immigrant communities and that foster restricted access to services for eligible beneficiaries.

**CHN opposes** massive enforcement and deportation initiatives that will tear apart immigrant families and communities.

**CHN opposes** the detention of mothers and children who are awaiting their opportunity to see a judge as they seek asylum in the U.S. and urges instead the use of community-based alternatives to detention for families.

## 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 U.S. Department of Agriculture and Census Bureau statistics, more than one out of eight people in the United States live in households that face a struggle against hunger.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** efforts to strengthen 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, ensure eligibility to more vulnerable people such as jobless adults, ex-offenders and immigrants, and connect more eligible people with program benefits. **CHN supports** ensuring that program funding is adjusted to address unmet needs and to keep pace with inflation. **CHN supports** additional funding to states to cover the costs of administering SNAP.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** restrictive structural changes to SNAP such as block grants or waivers that would undermine the individual entitlement to SNAP. **CHN opposes** any policy change that would incentivize states to place barriers to SNAP receipt. **CHN opposes** the use of reconciliation instructions intended to force cuts or restrictions to SNAP.

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

**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:** Children remain more likely to be poor in America than any other age group, with nearly one in five (21 percent) in poverty in 2015. As with adults, children of color experience poverty at much higher rates than their White peers. In 2015, 12 percent of non-Hispanic White children lived in poverty, while 36 percent of African American and 31 percent of Latino children were poor. (*Child Trends*) Children in working families are not immune to poverty, as 2015 census data shows that in two-thirds of poor families, at least one person worked, although not always full time or year round.

While their parents struggle to pay for necessities, children in poverty may pay in other ways, from damage to brain development to poorer physical and mental health, education and ultimately employment outcomes. The younger children are, the more at risk they are of being poor and the greater the potential for long-term consequences. 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.

**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) program was created in 1996, for every 100 families in poverty, 68 received benefits. Today, 23 families of every 100 receive benefits. In 12 states, fewer than 10 families receive cash assistance for every 100 families in poverty. At the start of the Great Recession, 1.69 million families were on TANF; by December 2010, despite the severe economic downturn, this number had only risen by 25,000. The TANF block grant has never been adjusted for inflation, with the result that the TANF block

grant to states has lost more than one-third of its value. (*Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Chart Book: TANF at 20*)

TANF is less effective in lifting families out of deep poverty (less than half the federal poverty level). While Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) lifted 2 million children out of deep poverty in 1995, in 2010 TANF was lifting only 635,00 children out of deep poverty. (*CBPP Chart Book: TANF at 20*)

**Early Childhood Programs:** High-quality early childhood programs can help children develop the skills they need to succeed in school and give 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 afterschool 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 those living in at-risk communities. They strengthen families by promoting maternal and infant health, safety and development. States have just begun to provide these effective services but the program will expire in FY 2017 if it is not extended, threatening significant progress.

**Child Welfare:** Every year approximately 3.2 million referrals are made to child protective services. More than 702,000 children are victims of maltreatment; more than 427,000 are in foster care; and more than 20,000 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. 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.

Four in ten abused and neglected children receive 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.

Foster care caseloads have increased for three straight years, with substance abuse a significant contributing factor. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 71 percent of states have experienced increased foster care placements, with parental substance abuse as the main reason for removal increasing by 13 percent.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** goals and children and family policies targeted to significantly reducing poverty, including some groups' national goal of cutting poverty in half by 2020. 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** adequate funding for the Community Services Block Grant, which funds community action agencies. **CHN supports** adequate funding for the Social Services Block Grant, which provides supportive services in communities where low-income children and families live.

**CHN supports** reforms to current savings and ownership limits in programs such as TANF, SNAP, and 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** increased funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant 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, increases access to substance abuse treatment and assists women experiencing domestic violence and their children who witness it. **CHN supports** the reauthorization of and full 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 for the 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.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** cuts the range of programs discussed above that help address vulnerable children’s needs. This includes Child Welfare Services and Promoting Safe and Stable Families. **CHN opposes** conversion of child welfare entitlement funding into a state block grant.

## **Building Pathways out of Poverty to Reconnect America’s Youth and Young Adults**

Far too many of the nation’s youth and young adults are poor. Census data for 2015 show that young adults account for a significant share of the poor and are poorer than other adults. For young adults (ages 18-24), nearly one in five lives in poverty and about 10.3 percent of young adults also are distressingly likely to live in deep poverty. Young adults of color experience poverty at higher rates than their White peers—28.3 percent for Black young adults, 23.1 percent for Asian young adults, and 20.9 percent for Hispanic young adults.

Youth and young adults living in high poverty urban and rural communities are less likely to have access to quality schools that would prepare them for postsecondary education and training and which have social networks that provide access to quality jobs, career exposure and pathways. Our nation’s high schools are losing too many young people before they graduate. An estimated 5.5 million youth – or one in seven young adults (13.8 percent) ages 16 to 24 -- are not working, are 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. And even seven years after the “official” end of the Great Recession, teen unemployment remains high at nearly 17 percent. While there have been improvements, the unemployment rate for youth and young adults ages 16-24 was more than twice as high as the overall unemployment rate of 5.3 percent. And, there is a distressing and persistent impact on youth of color – only one in five black teens and one in four Latino teens worked last year. 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.

Equally important is a focus on supporting young people who have been in contact with the justice system. Young people of color are also more likely to suffer from harsh school discipline policies and have contact with law enforcement that can push them out of school and lead to overrepresentation in the juvenile and criminal justice system compared to their White peers. Funding for law enforcement in schools has skyrocketed in the past decade, driving tens of thousands of children into the juvenile justice system for behaviors that, while difficult, are not, nor should they be, criminal. For example, male and female students of color are more likely to be referred to law enforcement from school than their White counterparts. Black and Hispanic students compose 39 percent of male students but 50 percent of referrals to law enforcement. Similarly, Black and Hispanic students compose 40 percent of female students but 55 percent of referrals to law enforcement. Incarceration follows individuals long after the sentence is over.

The collateral consequences of incarceration can impact a convicted person's long-term employment prospects, ability to access critical public benefits, including SNAP/food stamps, student loans and housing, and full participation in civic life.

Despite these odds, young people living in resource-poor communities possess unrivaled resiliency. We need policies that will support their development and tap into their promise and potential, strengthen and protect their civil rights and not threaten their safety, ability to access quality and affordable education, get a job, earn fair and equitable wages, and enter into a career. We need policies that reverse the devastating impacts of mass incarceration and law enforcement and education policies on communities of color and invest in the viability of communities, families, and youth themselves.

Thus we need a high priority focus on job creation strategies and career pathways for youth and young adults, education investments that keep youth in school, address punitive school discipline policies, and support dropout recovery and reengagement strategies. Vulnerable youth, including those attached to our juvenile justice and child welfare systems, face insurmountable odds as they transition into adulthood. We need justice policies that are fair and just; support youth in education, training, and healing; and prevent young men and women from going deeper into the criminal justice system. Federal policy and investments should support systemic, comprehensive, cross-systems interventions at the state and community levels with resources sufficient to the magnitude of the challenges we are facing as a nation. Congress and the Department of Labor, in partnership with the Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services, 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 to link youth and young adults to employment pipelines and pathways within infrastructure, energy, transportation sectors and other high demand industries, including subsidized summer and year-round employment, apprenticeships, and connections to private sector internships targeted to high poverty communities and those with high levels of unemployed youth and high school dropout rates.

**CHN supports** using the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins legislation and implementation efforts of The Every Student Succeeds Act as key opportunities to support investments in multiple education options and pathways, including dropout recovery and reengagement strategies, that lead to the attainment of secondary, postsecondary and industry credentials for young people. 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** efforts to improve school climate and reduce suspensions, expulsions and school-based arrests through implementation of The Every Student Succeeds Act and redirection of funding. Congress should assess the impact of school-based policing and any disparate impact



on specialized populations, particularly students of color, those with disabilities and LGBTQ students. Congress should also invest in federal funding streams and resources that help build positive school climates, including but not limited to mental health professionals, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school personnel trained in positive youth development.

**CHN supports** the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) with provisions to strengthen the law's core protections by reducing the placement of youth in adult jails pre-trial, providing more structure to the law's requirement to decrease racial and ethnic disparities, and phasing out exceptions that allow the detention of youth who have engaged in status offense behaviors. The bill also promotes the use of alternatives to incarceration, improves conditions and educational services for incarcerated youth, and strengthens state accountability.

**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, including policy provisions such as part-time and year-round Pell Grants, restoring the Ability to Benefit, work-study reform, transition and wrap-around supports, and protections against for profit entities that practice predatory practices harmful to poor and young people of color.

**CHN supports** reforms to the juvenile and criminal justice systems that seek to eliminate racial disparities in sentencing and policing, assist states in removing youth from the adult criminal justice system, close youth prisons and invest in community-based alternatives and expand comprehensive programs to formerly incarcerated individuals through funding and legislation, 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 youth of color, 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 *Reforming the Justice System* recommendations.)

## Promoting Inclusive Policies for People with Disabilities

There are over 50 million people with disabilities-- about 20 percent of the population-- living in America. According to the Census Bureau's official poverty measure, people with disabilities are roughly twice as likely as the general population to live below the poverty line. In 2015, the poverty rate for individuals with disabilities ages 18 to 64 years living in the community was 28.5 percent, while the poverty rate for individuals without disabilities ages 16 to 64 years living in the community was 11.0 percent—a poverty gap of 17.5 percentage points. In November 2016, 20.0 percent of people with disabilities were in the labor force, compared to 68.4 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 access to long-term services and supports in the home and community. **CHN supports** policies that would improve the direct care workforce through training, adequate wages and other supports, 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 Medicaid, Social Security, housing subsidies, accessible transportation 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 of 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 defined benefit pensions are disappearing rapidly. Persistent economic hard times and increasing income inequality have sapped Americans' ability to save for retirement.

For over 80 years, Social Security has been and continues to be the bedrock of most Americans' retirement and their protection in the event of long-term disability that makes it

not possible to work. About 61 million people were receiving Social Security as of September 2016, including 44 million retired workers and their dependents, six million survivors of deceased workers, and nearly 11 million workers with disabilities and their families.

The benefit is modest. In 2016, the average monthly payment for all retired workers was about \$1,340, or \$16,080 per year. It is slightly less for a disabled worker, at about \$1,166 per month on average. Still, in 2015, Social Security kept more than 1 in 3 seniors, some 15.1 million older Americans, from having incomes below the federal poverty level. However, using the U.S. Census Bureau's Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), which takes into account not just income but also expenses such as out-of-pocket medical costs, more seniors are unable to make ends meet. Using the SPM, in 2015, 1 in 7 seniors were poor and more than 2 out of 5 were at serious risk of being in deprivation. These rates are worse for elderly women, and African-American and Latino seniors.

As wages have become stagnant or even declined in real terms, workers have less income to get by, and are unable to save for an emergency let alone build retirement savings. The Great Recession also exacerbated the ability of seniors to retire in dignity. For low-income seniors, the housing bubble burst destroyed their home equity and economic security. Older Americans who lost their jobs following the financial crisis and remained unemployed were left with no choice but to claim Social Security benefits early. This cut the value of their benefits by one-third, due to the penalty for early retirement.

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 is critical to longtime low-wage workers whose Social Security benefits fall well below the poverty level when they reach retirement age. Individuals with limited work histories, including those who spent years in primarily caregiving roles, depend on SSI to survive. SSI also provides critical income support for families caring for children with significant disabilities and severe health conditions. The current asset limits of \$2,000 for an individual and \$3,000 for a couple has remained virtually constant for decades, despite inflation. Adjusted for inflation these threshold limits in 2016 would be \$8,600 for individuals and \$12,990 for couples. In 2017, the maximum monthly SSI benefit for an individual is \$735. This is approximately 75% of the poverty level for an aged individual.

Social Security is a program for all generations. Its benefits provide important financial security for about 6 million children, including the 3.2 million children who receive benefits directly because a parent has died, become disabled, or retired. In 2015, Social Security benefits lifted more than 1 million children out of poverty. As social insurance, it covers 98 percent of all children in the event of the death or disability of a caregiver. Social Security provides the equivalent of a life insurance policy with a face value of over \$600,000 for a young worker with average earnings, a spouse and two children.

Over the years, the Social Security Administration has established an exemplary record of efficiency in administering the programs for which it is responsible. In 2015, its administrative

expenses were 0.7% of total expenditures. SSA now faces the challenge of the baby boom generation entering its retirement years. Each day the SSA receives over 10,000 new applications for retirement benefits alone.

Budget cuts have reduced funding for the agency, just as its workload is expanding dramatically. Disability determination backlogs, long a top priority to abate, once more are on the rise to nearly one million cases. 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 Social Security benefits while ensuring the program's long-term solvency. This could include raising or removing the cap on taxable income. **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 young people who go to college. **CHN supports** strengthening the safety net provided by SSI by increasing the inadequate resource limits, updating the program's income and work exclusions that have been frozen since the SSI'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. **CHN supports** policies that ensure that SSI benefits are available only to adult recipients or managed for their use and benefit, the parents of the eligible child, or managed for the use and benefit of a child in substitute care.

**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 high-quality and timely service to the American people, which over the years has 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 them to fulfill their 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** privatizing Social Security or otherwise 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, SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). **CHN opposes** cutting already-modest Social Security benefits. **CHN opposes** cuts to eligibility, including raising the retirement age, means-

testing the benefit formula or adopting a “chained” consumer price index that would result in massive reductions in benefits received by the elderly, veterans and persons with disabilities. **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. **CHN opposes** policies that undermine defined benefit pensions.

## Improving Housing and Preventing Homelessness

The lack of affordable housing for Americans with the lowest incomes is a problem that has become overwhelming. Rents are rising, wages at the bottom of the labor market are flat, and more people are renting their homes than ever before. Yet, the supply of affordable housing has not kept pace. As a result, record-breaking numbers of families cannot afford a decent place to call home. Every state and every congressional district is impacted.

The response by the federal government remains woefully inadequate. Federal programs exist to provide affordable housing to Americans with the lowest incomes, but Congress has never agreed to spend anywhere near the money necessary to address the problem comprehensively. As a result, three-fourths of low-income Americans get no government help paying for housing. Austerity measures over the past several years have exacerbated the shortfall.

As a result, a large and growing number of Americans do not have housing they can afford. The greatest need for affordable housing—on the local, state, and national level—is primarily concentrated among extremely low-income renters who earn no more than 30 percent of their area median income (AMI). There is a shortage of 7.2 million affordable and available rental homes for the nation’s 10.4 million extremely low-income renters. This means that just three out of 10 extremely low-income families are able to find an affordable place to call home, and 75 percent of extremely low-income families are severely cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on rent and utilities. These families are often forced to make difficult choices between paying rent and buying groceries or visiting their doctor. In worst cases, they become homeless. Unaffordable rents lead to too little of everything else because, as sociologist Matt Desmond put it, “The rent eats first.”

The extreme is homelessness. Over half a million Americans at any one time are living in homeless shelters or in places not meant for human habitation. The rate of homelessness among African-Americans is nearly five times the rate for White Americans. Over the course of a school year, 2.5 million children live in a place that is not their family’s own home: doubled up with others or in a shelter or on the streets, due to economic hardship or loss of housing. This number has doubled since 2007.

This is especially appalling because there is a ready solution that is being shortchanged. The federal programs that exist have proven to be effective. For example:

- Targeted housing subsidies for homeless veterans have allowed communities to reduce veterans' homelessness by 47 percent over the past six years.
- An ongoing major research study by the Department of Housing and Urban Development entitled *Family Options* has demonstrated once again the many positive impacts on low-income families with children when help is provided to pay rent, including less homelessness, less family separation, less psychological distress, less domestic violence, fewer drug and alcohol problems, more consistent school attendance and fewer behavioral problems by children, and less food insecurity.
- A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research showed that, compared with other low-income children, those who grew up in Public Housing or with a rent subsidy had better employment and less incarceration as young adults, an effect that was particularly strong for African-American children.

In order to comprehensively address the problem of housing affordability experienced by low-income Americans, federal policy needs to enable three elements to be available, at a sufficient scale:

***Rent/operating subsidies*** -- Much of the problem can be addressed simply by helping low-income families pay rent in private-sector apartments. Even in housing that is specifically developed to be affordable, ongoing operating subsidies are necessary because the lowest income families cannot afford to pay enough rent to meet the ongoing costs of operating a building.

***Capital cost of building or rehabilitating more units*** – In many locations, existing private sector housing is not available in quantities that are necessary, even when reasonable rent subsidies are available. To help ease these market failures, federal policy needs to provide funding for new developments or to rehabilitate housing that has fallen into disrepair and is no longer usable.

***Short term emergency assistance to escape homelessness or stave off crises*** – Communities are increasingly finding that keeping people in their housing, or quickly returning them to housing if they become homeless, can be accomplished at a reasonable cost with good results.

**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, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and elsewhere, to fund these three elements. **CHN supports** Congress adequately funding all of these through annual appropriations and dedicated funding. With the notable exception of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program, virtually all existing housing programs are funded through “discretionary” spending, so responsible expansion of limits on that spending are particularly important for housing.

**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** including rental housing in any infrastructure package enacted, since housing is part of the built environment that is necessary for businesses and local economies to thrive, and its development employs people in a range of jobs.

**CHN supports** funding for and maintaining the structure of 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** supportive services and other interventions that, in addition to housing, are needed to address family homelessness, including early care and learning, adult education, employment assistance and mental health services.

**CHN supports** federal policies that will bring an end to 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. The largest federal subsidies for housing are through tax policy such as the mortgage interest deduction, which overwhelmingly benefits high-income people. These policies should be changed so that the supports are focused instead on people with the lowest incomes.

**CHN supports** the low-income housing tax credit, which uses tax subsidies to support development of housing that is affordable for people with modest incomes, and can be combined with rent subsidies to provide housing for people with extremely low incomes. 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.

**CHN supports** a more systematic and comprehensive approach to ending housing instability for extremely low-income Americans, through enactment of a housing policy that provides resources so that no one is homeless or lacks decent housing they can afford.

**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.

## 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.

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.

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.

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.

**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.



**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 supports** efforts to ensure access to financial services in consumers' preferred language.

**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, including through public institutions like the Postal Service. **CHN supports** transparency, free access to account information, and competition and fairness in banking and transaction services. **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 opposes** practices designed to induce consumers into incurring excessive fees.

**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, including people with medical debts. **CHN supports** measures to ensure that consumers can effectively correct errors in their credit reports, including fair and just treatment by credit reporting agencies.

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

**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 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 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** a strong and independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and efforts by other federal, state and local agencies to protect consumers. **CHN opposes** any attempts to weaken the CFPB by ending its dedicated funding or changing its status as an independent agency led by a single director. **CHN opposes** measures to make it more difficult for agencies to adopt and enforce consumer protection laws and rules to protect consumers.

## Preventing Disproportionate Environmental Threats to Low-Income People

The poisoning of hundreds of Flint, Michigan's children due to lead contamination in the city's water supply is a tragedy that should be a wake-up call to the nation. As the Flint disaster came to light, we learned that aging water systems in many communities are resulting in increased lead poisoning. The Natural Resources Defense Council reported that 18 million people were served by water systems with lead violations.

A full look at the problem reveals that the greatest threat of lead poisoning is found in and around housing units and public buildings, because of deteriorated lead-based paint in properties built before 1978 (when lead in paint was outlawed) that contaminates dust and soil in and around buildings. At the same time, industrial processing of lead and other toxic metals left a toxic footprint of poisonous lead particles in hundreds of residential areas across the country. For example, thousands of families in City of East Chicago, Indiana, live on properties contaminated with elevated arsenic levels and where lead-soil levels are 228 times the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allowable limits. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that four million households with children are exposed to lead contamination, and that over 535,000 American children younger than age six each year suffer from lead poisoning above 5 micrograms per deciliter.

The rate of lead poisoning has been substantially reduced in the decades since lead was outlawed in paint, children's products, new water pipes, and gasoline. Unfortunately, once lead is released in the environment, it does not dissipate on its own, remaining a source of contamination decades later. The CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the scientific community agree that there is no safe blood lead level in young children. Children with elevated blood lead levels suffer permanent brain damage that can result in developmental, behavioral, and other health problems. The societal costs of lead poisoning due to health care treatment alone are estimated at \$11 billion - \$53 billion, with total societal costs (including special education expenses and lost lifetime earnings) in the range of \$192 billion - \$270 billion.

Lead poisoning is especially inflicted on low-income communities, which are often disproportionately communities of color. Oftentimes, these communities have older housing stock, are located near freeways, former lead smelting plants, and, as in Flint, have older and inadequately maintained water systems. In the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago, more than one-fifth of children have damaging levels of lead poisoning. In Chicago's poor neighborhoods, African-American children are nearly three times more likely than white children to have elevated blood-lead levels that are associated with health and developmental damage.

Across the country, property owners are allowed to rent or sell their property without conducting a lead paint inspection or lead hazard risk assessment. This means the hazard is not identified until it appears in and harms children's developing bodies. In addition, the EPA's clearance standards for lead-paint, lead-dust, and lead-dirt are set too high to be protective of

the health of residents. In one study, 50 per cent of children residing in homes that met the Agency's current floor dust standards developed lead poisoning at levels above 5 µg/dL (Dixon 2009). In another study, lead hazard risk assessments failed to identify 85 per cent of homes that caused lead poisoning above 10 µg/dL. (Lanphear 2005). Similarly, children's blood lead levels increased with every 1000 parts per million increase in soil lead contamination. (Lanphear 2003).

Lead is a serious and preventable environmental hazard with heavy impact on low-income communities, but it is not the only hazard. Older housing stock is also subject to mold, carbon monoxide, radon, asbestos, or pest infestation that cause or worsen respiratory problems, such as asthma. Poorly maintained housing is less likely to be energy-efficient, and low-income households are more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses related to heat or cold. Low-income communities often do not have the political clout to prevent the location of manufacturing or waste disposal sites nearby, which can expose their residents to additional toxic substances. The impact of storms and flooding, as seen so tragically in New Orleans, is often worst in poor and minority communities, with insufficient ability to rebuild and protect the population without substantial federal assistance.

The majority of laws that might protect individuals and children from harm are not preventative in nature and address hazards after the harm has already occurred and the cost of repair is exorbitant. In addition, most laws pertaining to environmental threats allow for discretionary enforcement with responsibility divided unclearly among multiple departments. Without a collective data tracking system among local, state or federal authorities, the scope, effect and specific location of the problem is unreliable.

These issues have a severe effect on health outcomes and often result in lost employment or wages, school failure, increased crime and an inability to access opportunity or participate in society.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** a federal commitment to assist low-income communities in protecting their residents from health and safety threats due to environmental hazards, whether natural or human-made. Such assistance should be provided both for rapidly occurring disasters and for long-term problems such as inadequate maintenance of water systems or toxic substances concentrated in soil, housing units, or air. While it is appropriate for state or local governments to share in the costs, low-income communities will need help from the federal government in order to address environmental health problems, both in the form of funding and regulatory oversight of private and public sector entities. The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on low-income communities results at least in part from government decisions at all levels, such as the public works projects that channel flooding to spare upper-income communities while leaving low-income communities at risk, the negligence of authorities in failing to protect Flint residents from lead contamination when their source of drinking water was changed, or the failure of the EPA to inform City of East Chicago residents of the neurotoxins and carcinogens in their soil, despite knowledge and a duty to respond.

**CHN supports** federal funding to alleviate suffering and remedy such emergency and health-threatening conditions, without the requirement to offset the costs by cutting other programs.

**CHN supports** a national goal to end childhood lead poisoning, with actions and adequate funding across many federal agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the departments of Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, Treasury, Labor, and Health and Human Services. Funding to detect, track, abate, and treat lead poisoning and lead hazards should be increased by Congress. As a top priority, **CHN supports** steps to remove lead hazards from federal property or from property benefiting from federal assistance. HUD should utilize the most updated CDC reference values for blood lead levels in children. HUD should employ research-based tests to identify lead hazards in all federally assisted units that may be frequented by children and remediate or abate lead hazards to prevent harm to residents *before* a child occupies the unit. In federally-assisted units, if children with lead poisoning are present or a lead hazard is identified, families should be relocated to safe housing while lead removal occurs in their units.

**CHN supports** the use of Medicaid funds to remove lead hazards in units where children with lead poisoning live. **CHN supports** counting lead poisoning prevention and control activities as a community benefit that would meet IRS standards for nonprofit hospitals providing charitable services, increasing their incentive to carry out these activities.

**CHN supports** improved lead screening under Medicaid EPSDT requirements and the delivery of the full scope of services to which children are entitled. **CHN supports** collection and public dissemination of information about lead prevalence rates, especially among children enrolled in Medicaid.

**CHN supports** automatic eligibility for early intervention and special education screening services for children who have a current or past diagnosis of lead poisoning.

**CHN supports** updating the HUD and EPA guidelines and standards related to the lead-dust, lead-soil, lead-paint, lead-water testing and clearance standards to protect health.

**CHN supports** lead hazard and other healthy homes inspections prior to the sale or rental of a property or the issuance of a mortgage.

**CHN supports** increasing incentives, penalties and enforcement mechanisms for addressing lead hazards and other environmental conditions dangerous to health. **CHN supports** collaboration across federal and local agencies and public private partnerships to more quickly identify and address environmental hazards and better protect communities.

**CHN supports** community-based primary prevention strategies that engage and organize communities at high risk for environmental harm.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** funding reductions to essential lead poisoning prevention programs. In one example, funding for the CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention program has been cut in half since FY 2010, down to \$17 billion in FY 2016. Funding across the relevant federal agencies should be increased to prevent the human toll and attendant increased costs.

**CHN opposes** reducing the regulatory authority of the federal government to prevent or abate environmental health hazards, and **opposes** any reduction in existing federal agency environmental justice strategies that direct agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations.

## 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, which 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, including 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.

**The Coalition on Human Needs 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. 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 to reentry. Key components of a broad antipoverty strategy that not only reduces poverty but boosts economic security must include enacting policies aimed at reforming the 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. Racial profiling is consistently shown to be an ineffective law enforcement tactic, which wastes police resources by diverting attention away from proven, more effective, evidence-based law enforcement techniques. In late 2014, the Department of Justice (DOJ) issued long-awaited [revisions to its profiling guidance](#) for federal law enforcement. The revisions represented a step forward by expanding protected categories and closing loopholes. However, significant omissions continue to exist in the areas of national security and border integrity; moreover, the revisions do not apply to state and local enforcement. Of additional concern is the fact that the Department of Homeland Security has not updated its guidance to prohibit racial profiling in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency and the Transportation Security Administration. In June 2016, the DOJ also unveiled an [initiative](#) to ensure that all federal law enforcement officers and prosecutors will receive mandatory training in implicit bias. While an important step, mandatory implicit bias training alone is not enough to eradicate discrimination in prosecutions and policing. Furthermore, the DOJ initiative only applies to *federal* law enforcement. Many state and local law enforcement agencies have yet to follow suit and implement their own, mandatory implicit bias training programs. In Congress, [several bills](#) were introduced over the last two years that sought to combat racial profiling. Unfortunately, none was passed into law. Neither Congress nor the White House has mandated racial bias training or data collection on incidents of police use of force, pedestrian and traffic stops, and other police-community encounters for law enforcement agencies receiving federal funds.

**Police Misconduct:** Over the past several years, thousands of African American men and women have died at the hands of police officers across the country, often while unarmed and often under highly questionable circumstances. In response to these extra-judicial killings, the [President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing](#) was established. After eliciting comments from stakeholders, the Task Force released a [final report](#) in May 2015, which detailed recommendations that could be adopted by law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Between FY 2009 and FY 2016 the DOJ has aggressively investigated police departments, prisons, and other institutions and brought legal action where necessary. However, far too often the DOJ has been unable to fully prosecute police misconduct because the burden of proof for such offenses is unusually and insurmountably high. On the international front, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) issued concerns and [recommendations](#) for police use of force in August 2014, and the State Department [responded](#) in September 2015, noting the government's efforts to address the persistent problem of police brutality and racial profiling. Congress also passed [legislation](#) in late 2014 requiring states to track and periodically report the number of civilians who died while in the custody of law enforcement or in the process of arrest. Unfortunately, the DOJ has

yet to promulgate regulations that effectively enforce this law. And despite the modest reforms of the last two years, people of color continue to be killed on an almost daily basis by men and women in uniform, and too many local law enforcement agencies across the country systematically fail to hold officers accountable for highly suspicious, and potentially illegal, uses of force.

***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 in local law enforcement activities. The presence, and often use, of these weapons during peaceful protests has escalated hostility and endangered public safety, as was the case in Ferguson, Baton Rouge, and Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Combating the “War on Drugs” has often involved 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. In January 2015, President Obama issued [Executive Order 13688](#) establishing an interagency Law Enforcement Equipment Working Group to explore ways to regulate and support equipment transfers from federal agencies to local law enforcement. The Working Group released its [recommendations](#) in May 2015, which included a list of prohibited equipment transfers, training requirements, and mandatory data collection. State and local law enforcement agencies have been pressuring the DOJ’s Office of Justice Programs (OJP) to relax its recommendations, and OJP has responded by rolling back some requirements. Meanwhile, militarized responses to peaceful protests continue across the country.

***Sentencing Inequity:*** In January 2016, the Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections – a Congressionally-mandated, bipartisan organization – released its [final recommendations](#), which included repealing mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses, except for drug kingpins. 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 are disproportionately imprisoned in the United States. Despite comprising only 13 percent of the general population, African Americans made up about 37 percent of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ (BOP) population in 2016. Likewise, Hispanics comprised 17 percent of the general population in 2016, but made up 34 percent of the BOP’s population. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission’s official report to Congress in 2011, Hispanics comprised 38 percent of those convicted of an offense carrying a mandatory minimum penalty and African Americans 31 percent.

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 16 percent over its intended capacity, placing an overwhelming strain on BOP staffing and the DOJ’s budget. Several bills were introduced in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress that would have addressed the over-incarceration of people of color in the federal prison system, including legislation that would have reduced mandatory minimums for certain drug offenses and provided pathways for rehabilitation of people currently incarcerated. Legislation was also introduced that would have addressed the collateral

consequences of incarceration by expanding access to education, housing, employment, and mental health. Despite garnering bipartisan support, none of these legislative initiatives were passed into law.

**Clemency:** Thousands of Americans are currently serving unnecessarily long sentences due to the nation's overly harsh and outdated sentencing laws. Instead of allowing them to return to their families and reenter the workforce, prisons remain dangerously overcrowded and expensive. To address this, President Obama has been commuting the sentences of many Americans who are currently serving time for nonviolent offenses. As of October 2016, President Obama had commuted the sentences of 872 individuals, more than the last 11 presidents combined.

**Felony Disenfranchisement:** More than 10,000 people are released from state and federal prisons every week in this country, many of whom forever lose their right to vote. In early 2015, [legislation](#) was introduced that would have restored the right to vote for individuals convicted of a felony who had served their time. Despite earning droves of cosponsors, the legislation bounced between several committees and was never brought to a floor vote. Research has shown that formerly incarcerated individuals who vote are less likely to be rearrested. Furthermore, the widespread disenfranchisement of formerly incarcerated persons is contrary to the nation's democratic principles, disproportionately impacts minorities, and is a barrier to a person's successful reintegration back into society.

**Barriers to Employment:** Seventy million Americans have criminal records that mark them with a permanent scarlet letter that can deprive them of access to housing, financial aid for college, and employment. In particular, 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 2014, African Americans made up 28 percent of all arrests, even though African Americans only comprised approximately 13 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. This makes no sense for our economy, for employers, or for the nation.

In April 2016, the White House [announced](#) that the Office of Personnel Management would be directing some federal agencies to "ban the box" that asks about criminal records on job applications, thereby giving formerly incarcerated job applicants a fair chance to work in government and moving these agencies closer to the model screening policies employed by many states, cities, and corporations. While this is an important step, federal contractors – who employ nearly 25 percent of the nation's workforce – remain exempt from these ban-the-box requirements.

**Policing and Technology:** More and more law enforcement agencies across the country are fitting their police officers with body worn cameras in an effort to improve transparency and accountability. The federal government has funded many of these body worn camera



programs, awarding [\\$23 million in 2015](#) and [\\$20 million in 2016](#) to law enforcement agencies across the country. Despite the potential benefits of these cameras, their use remains largely unregulated. Many law enforcement agencies deploy body worn cameras in a way that does not adequately protect individual privacy rights, civil rights, or civil liberties. Similarly, face recognition technology has been increasingly used by federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. However, the DOJ has yet to investigate whether the use of such technology is having a disparate impact on communities of color, potentially exacerbating and entrenching existing policing disparities. Finally, law enforcement agencies and courts are increasingly using technology to predict whether someone poses a risk to public safety or whether crime is likely to occur in a certain area. Without proper precautions, such prediction-based technology threatens to undermine constitutional rights and amplify preexisting racial and ethnic biases within the criminal justice system.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** passage of a federal anti-racial profiling law.

**CHN supports** the Trump Administration requiring law enforcement agencies that receive federal funding to collect data on police-civilian encounters, including encounters that involve the use of force, sexual assault, misconduct, and the deaths of individuals not technically in the custody of law enforcement. **CHN supports** building on the FBI's attempts to collect data on police-community encounters.

**CHN supports** building on the bipartisan momentum garnered in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress and, moving forward, pushing for sentencing reform legislation that specifically addresses front end drivers of mass incarceration that have led to overcrowding and overspending at the federal level.

**CHN supports** the adoption of body worn camera policies that adequately protect privacy rights, civil rights, and civil liberties. Law enforcement agencies should: (1) develop body worn camera policies publicly, seeking community and stakeholder input; (2) commit to a set of narrow and well-defined purposes for which cameras and their footage may be used; (3) specify clear operational policies for recording, retention, and access of footage; (4) make footage available to promote accountability with appropriate privacy safeguards in place; and (5) preserve the independent evidentiary value of officer reports by prohibiting officers from viewing footage before filing their report.

**CHN supports** passage of bipartisan 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** 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 *Citizens United* decision in 2010, an unprecedented amount of money – lots 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 Commission* 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.

While federal efforts to strengthen our democracy continue to face an uphill challenge in Washington, DC, voters in red, blue, and purple states recently approved key democracy proposals that were on the November, 2016 ballot. **Alaska** voters approved automatic voter registration, joining California, Connecticut, Oregon, Vermont, and West Virginia as states that have already approved this practice; **California** voters approved a proposition strengthening transparency in the state legislature and increasing citizens' access to information; **Maine** voters approved ranked choice voting; **Missouri** voters created campaign contribution limits for state and judicial candidates, committees, and political parties; and **South Dakota** voters approved an initiative enacting contribution limits on donations from parties, political action committees and lobbyists, requiring more transparency and instituting other money in politics reforms.

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 and economic 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.

**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 Framework for Measuring Economic Security and Hardship

Good decisions require good data. Census Bureau data are used to distribute more than \$400 billion a year in funds to meet critical needs of American communities. The availability of objective, high-quality data helps inform us about Americans' economic security and hardship and ensures that Congress and the Administration can target resources prudently to communities and population groups in need and avoid wasteful expenditures. To ensure the usefulness and accuracy of these surveys in representing every U.S. household and business, adequate funding without harmful restrictions is essential. Unfortunately, some existing data collection efforts have been targeted for budget cuts or fundamental weakening, making it more difficult for public and private sector leaders to make informed decisions about policy, investment, and the American economy. Three priority areas stand out:

First, preparations for the 2020 decennial census are threatened by inadequate funding. The decennial census, which is mandated by the U.S. Constitution, will drive congressional and legislative redistricting for the coming decade and will form the starting place for federal funding formulas and for most major household surveys in the United States. The 2020 census and related Census Bureau activities received funding in the fiscal year 2017 Senate appropriations bill that was \$100 million (7 percent) below the amount the Bureau requested. The House level was even lower. Ironically, such underfunding could burden taxpayers with enormous, unnecessary costs as the Census Bureau is forced to abandon promising 21st century innovations due to lack of thorough testing and fall back on costlier but "tried and true" counting methods. The innovations, such as using smart phones for interviews and using previously collected data to identify vacant homes, could save taxpayers more than \$5 billion dollars in the cost of conducting the census and make responding easier for all U.S. residents.

Without these innovations, the Bureau would have to forge ahead with sweeping operational reforms that have not been fully tested, potentially resulting in system failures and a skewed count of the American people. Also at risk are activities such as the communications campaign and partnership program, designed to reach historically hard-to-count population groups, including rural and low-income residents, immigrants, people without higher education, people of color, and young children and young families.

Second, the American Community Survey (ACS) faces ongoing efforts to make response voluntary. The ACS is the nation's main source of local and state data on poverty, household income inequality, racial equity, health insurance, education, affordable housing, residents with disabilities, and many other topics. It is the ongoing part of the decennial census that provides annually updated information on important social and economic characteristics of our communities. The House of Representatives has tried repeatedly in recent years to make participation in the ACS voluntary rather than mandatory, a step that would critically weaken the survey by lowering the response rate, raising data collection costs, and seriously diminishing data quality. (The Senate rejected the proposal each time.) Experience shows the negative effects of making such a large survey voluntary. Canada made a similar national survey voluntary in 2011, but recently made it mandatory again after experiencing a sharply falling response rate, lower data quality, and higher costs of data collection; in one in four Canadian communities — chiefly small towns and rural areas — data produced by the voluntary survey were of so low quality that they could not be used. Repeating Canada's mistake by making the ACS voluntary could result in a higher taxpayer burden, inefficient government spending, and inadequate data on America's rural and marginalized populations.

Third, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) — a unique source of information on material hardships (such as falling behind on rent or mortgage), duration of poverty spells, income volatility, benefit receipt, and program entries and exits during the year — has suffered cutbacks. Due largely to tight Census Bureau budgets, SIPP funding has declined in recent years. This has contributed to elimination of revealing hardship data (such as whether families' heat or electricity or phone service have been shut off for failure to pay). It has also led to less frequent interviewing and reduced ability to track households' economic progress and setbacks during the year. SIPP must be protected to ensure policymakers and researchers have an adequate understanding of the range of financial and material hardships Americans face.

**The Coalition on Human Needs 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, and other statistical programs within the federal government. The present system of annual appropriations caps must be adjusted to accommodate the large temporary cost of the 2020 decennial census. A mechanism should be added to the Budget Control Act to exempt from the non-defense discretionary (NDD) spending caps necessary incremental decennial census costs (projected to be more than \$4 billion between 2019 and 2020) to ensure that the Census Bureau has sufficient funds to prepare for and accurately implement the 2020 census.

Funding for other Census surveys must be preserved, as must mandatory participation in the ACS.

**CHN supports** preserving both the federal official poverty measure (OPM) and the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). The SPM derives from recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences and improves on the OPM in part by accounting for the value of in-kind resources such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and several others. This addresses longstanding conservative critiques of the OPM while documenting these programs' effectiveness in reducing economic insecurity.

**CHN supports** the development of family budget standards above the poverty lines used in the OPM and SPM, which more accurately reflect the economic resources families currently need to make ends meet at a modest but adequate level. As an initial step, **CHN supports** the federal government's production of annual low-income data on the share of the population living below various fractions of national median income (adjusted for family size).

## Implementing Existing Federal Policies

The Coalition on Human Needs 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. 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.

**The Coalition on Human Needs supports** effective enforcement of laws that protect workers, consumers, and the environment. Effective enforcement requires adequate funding and CHN urges appropriations levels that ensure that existing federal policies achieve their intended goals. **CHN supports** opportunities for wide public comment before regulatory changes.

**The Coalition on Human Needs opposes** efforts to overturn regulations as a block or to put a moratorium on regulations regardless of their impact.

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. When services are administered through grants or contracts, there should be transparency around both costs and outcomes.

Many low-income and vulnerable populations are served by multiple programs, administered by different agencies and/or at different levels of government. 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.

**The Coalition on Human Needs 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 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.

**The Coalition on Human Needs 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.

## Scrutinizing Executive and Judicial Branch Nominees

The president's nominees to key cabinet, agency and advisory positions have an enormous impact on all of the human needs policies, programs and services discussed in this document. Similarly, nominations to the federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, are of concern to CHN. The people who occupy these positions have the ability to establish and implement good policies or bad policies that affect every aspect of low-income and other vulnerable people's lives. CHN will, at its discretion, scrutinize nominees' qualifications and support or oppose individual nominations where warranted.

*The positions in CHN's Public Policy document reflect the general consensus of member organizations on issues contained within it, but the document does not reflect the specific positions of all member organizations in every policy area.*