



# ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY AGENDA

## Who We Are

Alabama Institute for Social Justice (AISJ) focuses on addressing systemic change that is necessary because of institutional and structural inequities. Among its strategies, AISJ works to remove barriers that particularly limit and/or undermine the economic well-being of women and people of color through leadership development and training, advocacy and public policy, and racial healing and reconciliation.

## Our Policy and Advocacy Mission

AISJ works to achieve meaningful and sustainable systems change in support of under-resourced children and families in Alabama's Black Belt.

Through the advancement of a bold organizational policy agenda rooted in racial equity and social justice, we seek to go beyond adjustments to the status quo and instead drive transformational change in public policy, organizational culture, and the public narrative within government, businesses, and our communities.

AISJ engages in advocacy to address barriers to quality educational and job opportunities and ensure a seamless transition for human success from birth to adulthood. Our work varies by issue but always centers five core policy goals: Intentionality, Integrity, Inclusion, Investment, and Impact.

## Core Policy Goals

- **Intentionality** – Establish clear and intentional commitments to racial equity and social justice as core principles and values of policy making, legislation, and the regulatory process at all levels of government.
- **Integrity** – Ensure that policy making is evidence-based, data-driven (both quantitative and qualitative), transparent, and done in collaboration with impacted communities. Establish policy making processes that acknowledge and are honest about the historical and structural realities and impacts our communities have experienced and continue to face, and what it will take to achieve transformative change.
- **Inclusion** – Elevate and empower the individuals who are directly impacted by policy so that impacted communities are a core part of the policy and decision-making process from the beginning. Build a new approach among government agencies, policymakers, and organizations that goes beyond simply inviting impacted stakeholders to the table and instead truly centers the experiences, needs, and desires of those directly impacted by policy.
- **Investment** – Increase and deepen investment in equity and social justice issues through commitments of time, resources, and state funding. Obtain measurable investment in addressing equity and social justice from the business and stakeholder communities within their organizational goals and outcomes.
- **Impact** – Support the creation of policies that have a large enough impact to create measurable gains with a real-world, positive, and timely impact on the lives of those directly affected by an issue.

## Why Child Care:

The Alabama Institute for Social Justice (AISJ), formerly known as the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama, Inc. (FOCAL), was established in 1972 as a child-care advocacy agency in response to an outcry from a group of African-American women in Selma, Alabama, who sought to achieve quality and equitable child care for their children. While our mission has evolved, advocating for quality child care remains foundational to our body of work as we address barriers to quality educational and job opportunities and ensure a seamless transition for human success from birth to adulthood.

Child care is critical infrastructure which allows parents to enter and participate in the workforce while ensuring that our children receive high quality care and education. Yet despite its role as an essential service for our families, communities, and economy, our child care system is significantly under-funded and under-resourced. Even before COVID-19, the state of the child care industry in Alabama was, at best, fragile, and in underserved communities it was on life support. Today, however, we are in a state of crisis. If Alabama's economy and communities are to fully recover, we must address the issues resulting in child care becoming less and less accessible and affordable.

## Our Child Care Mission:

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AISJ engages in advocacy to address barriers to quality educational and job opportunities and ensure a seamless transition for human success from birth to adulthood. Our work varies by issue but always centers five core policy goals: Intentionality, Integrity, Inclusion, Investment, and Impact.

## Child Care Policy Agenda:

- **Make Child Care a Public Good** – Change the approach to child care, which is currently treated as a private sector service available to those who can afford it, and instead treat it as a public good, vital to the wellbeing of our society and economy, and affordable and accessible for all.
- **Improve Workforce Development** – Value the work of child care employees and the critical role they play in educating and caring for our youngest citizens by establishing compensation and benefits standards that provide a living wage and investing in professional development opportunities.
- **Remove Market Rate Restrictions** – Transition away from the failed market rate model, which underfunds the actual cost of providing quality child care and early education, and implement a true cost-based model for funding child care.
- **Improve the Regulatory Environment** – Improve communication and collaboration with state and local agencies, simplify regulations, and remove obstacles that child care providers face so that they can focus on what they do best – running a business and providing quality care and education.

## Make Child Care a Public Good

The Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to change both public perception and government approaches to child care, which is currently treated as a private sector service available to those who can afford it, and instead treat it as a public good, vital to the wellbeing of our society and economy, and affordable and accessible for all.

### The Problem

The child care system in America has failed. Under the current structure, child care is neither affordable for families, nor financially sustainable for providers and workers. Many families can't access child care when and where they need it.

Families struggle to afford child care; for many it is the largest item in their monthly budget. According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), the average annual cost of infant care in Alabama is about \$500 per month, while the average cost for a four-year old is \$432 per month. Although the U.S. Department of Human Services states that affordable childcare should cost no more than seven percent of a family's income, the typical Alabama family spends about 22 percent of their income on child care for an infant and four-year old. Although subsidies are available for low-income families, eligibility rules are narrow and complex, and many families who struggle to afford child care fail to qualify.

Despite the costs faced by families, these funds aren't enough to cover the true costs of providing high quality care and education for our children. Providers are forced to look for grants and donations to subsidize their programs. Due to insufficient funding, the child care system relies heavily on the work of low-income and black women whose underpaid labor is used to subsidize the industry. Workers receive low, often poverty-level wages and few if any benefits, and many must use public benefits programs to support their own families.

Even when families can manage to pay for care, they often cannot access it when and where they need it. There may not be available spaces at nearby providers, or they may need care during non-traditional hours while working night, weekend, or holiday shifts.

Child care is a part of the critical public infrastructure that is foundational to a strong society and economy. Child care workers teach and care for our children during the critical birth to five period of social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. And child care provides an essential service that supports parents to both enter and remain in the workforce.

Yet unlike other public goods that are important to our economy and society, such as highways, fire protection, and public schools, our child care system is designed as an unaffordable, inaccessible, and ultimately unsustainable private good.

## The Solution

Even before COVID-19, the state of the child care industry in Alabama was, at best, fragile, and in underserved communities it was on life support. Today, however, we are in a state of crisis. If Alabama's economy is to fully recover, we MUST save child care. go beyond adjustments to the status quo and instead drive a transformational change in child care. We must make child care the public good that it truly is.

Making child care a public good will:

- Properly fund the child care system to cover the actual costs of providing quality, affordable care for all families.
- Expand access to child care so that all families can find care when and where they need it.
- Increase the quality of early care and education for all children no matter where they live or what their family income is.
- Provide living-wage compensation and benefits for child care employees, decreasing workforce turnover, and creating new well-paying jobs.
- Enable parents to enter and remain in the workforce, leading to greater economic prosperity for families and a stronger economy for Alabama.

## How We Get There

- Provide robust government funding to cover the true cost of quality early care and education and ensure that families never pay more than 7% of their income for child care.
- Establish and fund living wage compensation and benefits standards for child care workers, along with clear pathways for professional growth and development.
- Expand provider networks so that there are enough child care spaces for all families within their own communities that meet the needs of our modern 24-hour, 7-day a week workforce.

## Improve Workforce Development

The Alabama Institute for Social Justice fights to ensure that the work of child care employees, and the critical role they play in educating and caring for our youngest citizens, is valued through establishment of compensation and benefits standards that provide a living wage and investment in professional development opportunities.

### The Problem

As a society, we have historically undervalued the work done by women and minorities, particularly black women. This inequity is systemic in the child care and early education industry, where the workforce is predominantly women, and disproportionately women of color.

Despite providing foundational education and skills development for children, as well as the infrastructure which allows parents to participate in the workforce, child care workers remain underpaid, receiving low, often poverty level wages.

Minorities and those who work with infants and toddlers make even less than their peers on average, regardless of their education level. These low wages mean that a majority of child care workers make use of public benefit programs to support their families.

Although child care workers care for and educate children during the critical period of growth and development from birth to five, they are paid significantly less than their peers in the K-12 system. Child care employees with the same skills and training, providing similar levels of care and education, can find themselves working beside colleagues making better wages simply because they staff a Pre-K classroom.

As a result, the child care industry has a high rate of employee turnover as workers leave for better paying jobs in other industries.

### The Solution

Child care workers have been historically undervalued and underpaid, despite the fundamental role they play in the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children. It is past time to make equitable investments in the child care workforce, provide wages and professional development that accurately reflects the value they provide to our families, communities, and economy.

Investing in child care workforce development will:

- Establish living-wage compensation and benefits standards for the childcare workforce.
- Provide affordable and accessible opportunities and clear pathways for continued professional development that lead to career growth and higher salaries.
- Decrease the high rate of industry turnover.
- Increase the quality of care and education our children receive, particularly from birth to five.

## How We Get There

- Ensure American Rescue Plan child care and fiscal relief funds directly reach individual early care and education staff through increased compensation and retention and recruitment allowances.
- Increase child care funding to cover the true cost of hiring and retaining a quality workforce, including living wage standards and provision of benefits such as health care and paid sick leave.
- Provide financial support and incentives for child care workers to increase their training and education through continued professional development.

## Remove Market Rate Restrictions

The Alabama Institute for Social Justice advocates for Alabama to transition away from the failed market rate model for child care subsidies, which underfunds the actual cost of providing quality child care and early education and implement a true cost-based model for funding child care.

### The Problem

The current market rate model of funding child care subsidies has failed our families and providers. Existing payment rates represent only a fraction of the actual cost of providing quality child care and early education. The gap between rates and actual costs is even wider for programs that serve infants and toddlers.

The market rate model is based on what providers charge private-pay families, but these charges are artificially low and do not reflect the true cost of providing quality child care. Providers establish their private-pay rates based on what families can afford to pay and what other local programs are charging.

If parents cannot afford to pay higher rates, the provider may not be able to increase their prices to cover true costs. Providers must often seek other sources of revenue such as grants and donations to subsidize what they charge private-pay families. This underfunding also plays a role in the low salaries of the child care workforce, which is comprised of predominantly low-income and black women who further subsidize the industry with their labor.

Because the market rate is based on artificially low private-pay charges which are themselves subsidized, providers are caught in a cycle of continuous underfunding resulting in a perpetual struggle to keep their doors open and provide high-quality programs.

### The Solution

Covid 19 has amplified the critical role of child care in enabling parents to work and the financial precariousness of child care businesses due to insufficient funding that doesn't cover actual program costs. The time is now to move away from the failed market rate subsidy funding model to a true cost-based model that funds child care as the critical infrastructure public good that it is.

A cost-based model will:

- Cover provider's actual costs and ensure dedicated long-term funding, allowing providers to plan for the future and invest in program quality.
- Provide sufficient funding to establish living-wage compensation and benefits standards for the childcare workforce.
- Eliminate the need for providers to search for additional funding streams such as grants or donations to subsidize their programs, allowing them to redirect their time and resources back into their programs.

## How We Get There

- The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education should use child care stabilization and state and local fiscal relief funds provided through the American Rescue Plan as an opportunity to transition away from the failed market rate model and move to a cost-based model for funding child care as allowed under current CCDF regulations.
- Congress and the US Department of Health and Human Services should build upon the principles of actual cost funding required by the child care stabilization grants within the American Rescue Plan, and eliminate the market rate model provisions within CCDF requirements, replacing them instead with fully-funded cost-based models.



## Improve the Regulatory Environment

The Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to improve communication and collaboration with state and local agencies, simplify regulations, and remove obstacles that child care providers face so that they can focus on what they do best – running a business and providing quality care and education.

### The Problem

Child care providers are committed professionals, who care deeply for children and excel at providing quality child care and early education to their communities while running small businesses. However, most are not experts at navigating the complicated and highly-technical processes that regulate and fund the industry.

Obstacles child care providers face include: lack of awareness of funding opportunities or regulatory requirements, overly complicated and time-consuming application and reporting processes, the use of unfamiliar jargon or technical language in communications, extensive documentation requirements, insufficient lead-time to prepare paperwork before deadlines, and lack of technical support, among others.

Many providers must spend more time navigating regulatory requirements and paperwork than they can growing their business, engaging with their families, enhancing their programming, and supporting their workforce.

And burdensome regulations don't just directly impact providers, Alabama's families are negatively impacted as well. Child care subsidy programs such as Alabama's Childcare Resources Supplemental Child Care Program are intended to help low-income families afford care, but narrow eligibility requirements prevent many struggling families from receiving the support they need.

### The Solution

Child care providers face a complex regulatory environment which limits the effectiveness of industry programs and investments. Engaging in collaboration that centers the experiences of the communities being served, improving communication, simplifying regulations, and removing obstacles facing child care providers will improve program impact and integrity, while allowing providers to do what they do best – provide quality child care and education.

Improving the regulatory environment will:

- Increase provider engagement and inclusion, centering the experiences of child care providers and families within the decision-making process.
- Improve relationships between providers and regulatory agencies, leading to partnerships that improve program impact and integrity.
- Ensure that providers and families receive the supports they need to provide and access quality child care and education.

## How We Get There

- Regulatory agencies and funding organizations should actively include child care providers and members of the workforce in the consultation, decision-making and strategic processes for rule-making and funding implementation in order to ensure the greatest positive impact and ROI for child care providers, workforce, and families.
- Revise regulatory and funding requirements, including application, approval and reporting processes, so that they are as simple, streamlined, and straightforward as possible for providers. Limit required documentation and information to only that which is necessary, such as for federal reporting requirements, and accept a variety of documentation.
- Increase and improve communication and transparency around organizational processes, decisions, and timelines related to regulation and funding. Communicate through a variety of mediums, in plain language, and provide free and accessible technical assistance to providers.

## Why Voter Engagement

The right to vote is essential for a well-functioning democracy; however, the United States has a long history of denying this right to all citizens, particularly Black citizens. Although the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment gave citizens the right to vote regardless of race, existing social structures and the passage of Jim Crow laws created barriers to voting for Black men and women. State legislatures passed poll taxes, literacy tests, and other measures to disenfranchise Black voters, who also faced outright intimidation, injury, and death for attempting to vote. Those who managed to vote often had their votes “misplaced,” destroyed, or “disqualified.” The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed to prevent racially targeted voter suppression. The Act placed constraints on Alabama and other southern states and required federal oversight of their voting procedures. It also prevented the gerrymandering of electoral districts to dilute the voting power of minority communities.

Today we face a new assault on the freedom to vote. In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down key sections of the Voting Rights Act and states immediately began to pass new restrictions on voting and aggressively removing individuals from voting rolls. In the wake of record high turnout among Black and minority voters in the 2020 election, legislative efforts to restrict the freedom to vote have intensified.

## Our Voter Engagement Mission

AISJ works to achieve meaningful and sustainable systems change that increases voter participation, engagement, and protection in order to strengthen and defend our democracy.

Through the advancement of a bold organizational policy agenda rooted in racial equity and social justice, we seek to go beyond adjustments to the status quo and drive transformational change in public policy, organizational culture, and the public narrative within government, businesses, and our communities.

AISJ engages in advocacy to protect the freedom to vote and remove barriers for participation at the ballot box, particularly among minority, low-income, and other marginalized communities. Our work varies by issue but always centers five core policy goals: Intentionality, Integrity, Inclusion, Investment, and Impact.

## Voter Engagement Policy Agenda

- **Reduce Barriers to Voting** – Increase eligible voters’ ability to access the ballot box through proven safe and effective measures including automatic and same-day voter registration, no-excuse vote by mail, early voting, curbside voting, and protections against voter purging and intimidation.
- **Non-Partisan Redistricting** – Create a non-partisan redistricting process, independent of the legislature, that maximizes citizen participation and adheres to legally set criteria such as contiguity, consistency, compactness, communities of interest, and equitable electoral opportunity for minorities.
- **Register, Educate, and Engage Voters** – Expand the number of eligible voters who participate in our democracy and believe in the power of their vote through voter registration drives, educational programs, and community engagement actions.

## Reduce Barriers to Voting

Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to protect Alabamian's fundamental right to vote and participate in our democracy by advocating for proven safe and effective measures that increase access to the ballot box and the removal of obstacles to voting rooted in a legacy of racial discrimination and voter intimidation.

### The Problem

Alabama has a long history of voter suppression rooted in efforts to establish and maintain white supremacy. During the Jim Crow era, Alabama embedded numerous discriminatory requirements into the state constitution including a poll tax, literacy test, and property ownership requirements, all of which were intended to disenfranchise Black and poor white voters.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which required the state to seek federal preclearance before any voting laws and rules could be made, was credited with blocking Alabama from passing more than 100 proposed changes to voting laws or rules that the Justice Department concluded were discriminatory against people of color.

But in 2013, The U.S. Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*, ending federal preclearance requirements. The impact was immediate as state and local governments began to implement barriers to voting that disproportionately impacted Black and other minority voters.

In a 2020 report on barriers to voting, the Alabama State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights identified numerous voting regulations instituted by the state of Alabama since the Supreme Court decision which imposed often insurmountable barriers for Alabama's poor and minority populations as they seek to exercise their right to vote.

One of the first changes Alabama made to its voting laws post-*Shelby* was to institute one of the most restrictive voter identification requirements in the country. The state has also undertaken a significant purge of its voter rolls. An estimated 658,000 voters have been removed from voter rolls since 2015, with 340,000 voters being removed in 2017 alone<sup>1</sup>.

The state has closed more than 70 polling places since 2013<sup>2</sup>. As one of only 11 states that do not offer early voting and with strict limitations on absentee voting eligibility, many voters must now travel long distances to increasingly busy polling places, standing in long lines to vote during limited hours on a single day. These obstacles are especially challenging for those with child care obligations, working multiple jobs, or without access to reliable or accessible public transportation.

During the 2021 legislative session the Alabama State Legislature passed a ban on curbside voting, preventing those with disabilities from receiving reasonable accommodation to access their right to vote.

## The Solution

Alabama voters have historically faced numerous challenges and obstacles to voting, with Black, other minority, and poor voters disproportionately targeted and impacted by these restrictions. Additional barriers to voting have only increased since the Supreme Court struck down the requirement for federal preclearance of changes to voting laws and regulations. Removing voting obstacles and improving accessibility are critical to ensuring Alabamian's right to vote as the foundation of American democracy.

Reducing Barriers to Voting will:

- Increase public participation in our democracy, better ensuring that our government representatives and policies reflect the values and priorities of all Alabamians.
- Remove obstacles to voting that disproportionately affect Black and minority voters and their communities.
- Ensure that registering to vote and the act of voting are simple and easy for all eligible citizens.

## How We Get There

- Remove barriers to registration for voters by implementing automatic and same-day voter registration.
- Establish a period of multi-day in-person early voting, including weekend availability and permit any registered voter to vote by absentee ballot in any election in which they are qualified to vote.
- Simplify voter identification requirements to ensure equitable access to required documents, removing the photo requirement, and increasing types of acceptable identification.
- Implement protections against voter purging and intimidation and increase voter education regarding voting rights.

## Non-Partisan Redistricting

Alabama Institute for Social Justice supports equitable and transparent apportionment of electoral districts in Alabama through redistricting reform, the end of gerrymandering, and the creation of fair voting maps that allow voters to pick their representatives rather than allowing politicians to select their voters.

### The Problem

Every ten years, following the decennial census, each state undertakes the process of redistricting, reapportioning the population and redrawing both congressional and state legislative district lines. In Alabama these state legislative and congressional district lines are drawn by the Legislature. The Governor may veto the legislature's redistricting plan, the legislature can override the veto with a simple majority vote in each chamber.

Because the redistricting process is controlled by incumbent politicians, these legislators are incentivized to redraw the lines so that they retain their power and further their political goals through a process known as gerrymandering.

Two main gerrymandering strategies are "cracking," where a political interest group's supporters are spread across many districts, thus diluting their voting power, and "packing," where a political interest group's supporters are concentrated in one district to reduce their voting power in other districts. In addition to being used for purely partisan purposes, cracking and packing have often been used to racially gerrymander, preventing Black and other minority citizens from electing their candidate of choice.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 required that Alabama, among other southern states, receive federal approval before implementing new redistricting maps. For nearly fifty years this preclearance served as a powerful tool to combat racial gerrymandering intended to limit the voting power of Blacks and other minorities. However, in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, including the requirement that Alabama's redistricting maps receive federal approval.

As recently as 2017, a federal district court found that state legislators had unjustifiably used race as the "dominant or controlling" consideration in redrawing state legislative districts.

## The Solution

When politicians control the redistricting process, they are able to use it as a means to further their own political goals. In Alabama this process has resulted in a long legacy of racially discriminatory redistricting. We must create a non-partisan redistricting process, independent of the legislature, that maximizes citizen participation and adheres to legally set criteria such as contiguity, consistency, compactness, communities of interest, and equitable electoral opportunity for minorities.

Non-Partisan Redistricting will:

- Allow voters to pick their representatives instead of politicians selecting their voters.
- Prevent the manipulation of legislative districts by either political party for partisan purposes.
- Increase the likelihood of truly competitive districts, where candidates must gain support from a broad range of voters, rather than pander to a single political faction.
- Prevent the manipulation of electoral districts for discriminatory purposes intended to prevent or limit the participation, influence, or votes of Black, Brown, and other minority voters.

## How We Get There

- Create an independent, non-partisan redistricting commission to draw both state and Congressional districts with provisions to prevent manipulation for partisan or discriminatory purposes.
- Establish legal criteria for redistricting including banning partisan gerrymandering and ensuring equitable electoral opportunity for minorities.
- Require transparency throughout the redistricting process, ensuring public access to all meetings as well as opportunities for public input, review of proposed maps, and feedback throughout the process.
- Enact federal legislation reinstituting preclearance approval of redistricting maps in jurisdictions with pervasive and persistent discrimination.

## Register, Educate and Engage Voters

Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to expand the number of eligible voters who participate in our democracy and believe in the power of their vote by investing in and engaging with local communities to counteract generations of voter suppression efforts that still continue today.

### The Problem

Voter engagement and participation in Alabama is decreasing. Only 63 percent of registered voters cast a ballot in the 2020 general election compared to almost 67 percent in 2016 and an average of 73 percent in the previous three general elections from 2004-2012. Participation in midterm elections, without a presidential contest on the ballot is even poorer, with only 50% of voters in participating in 2018 and a just under 40% voter participation in 2014.

Meanwhile, only 68 percent of the adult population in Alabama was registered to vote in the 2020 election, with 71% of white adults and less than 61 percent of Black adults registered. While the percentage of white adults registered has seen a small percentage increase since 2016, the number of black adults registered to vote has decreased by more than 12 percent.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to voting, the difference between white and Black registered voters is equally stark. Only 57 percent of registered Black voters cast a ballot in the 2020 election, compared to 65.6 percent of registered white voters.

There are many reasons for this lack of voter engagement, including the belief that voting – or the casting of a single ballot – doesn't matter, general disillusionment with the government or electoral system, difficulties in registering or actually casting a ballot, a lack of knowledge about or enthusiasm for the candidates, and the feeling that candidates are not talking about what matters to voters and their communities. For Blacks and other minorities, the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and present-day voter suppression and intimidation also play a key role in low voter registration and electoral participation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/voting-and-voter-registration-as-a-share-of-the-voter-population-by-raceethnicity/>



## The Solution

Voter engagement is essential for a well-functioning democracy, yet participation rates across demographics remain low and historically disenfranchised communities continue to encounter voter suppression. We must expand the number of eligible voters who participate in our democracy and build electoral power among disadvantaged communities through voter registration efforts, educational programs, and community engagement actions.

Registering, Educating and Engaging Voters will:

- Increase voter turnout and participation among minorities and other underrepresented groups.
- Increase knowledge surrounding voting laws and confidence in the power of their vote among historically suppressed communities.
- Increase grassroots community participation in advocacy to advance voting rights and expand voter access.

## Why Gender Equity:

Women face historical and social disadvantages that can affect almost every aspect of their lives from educational and economic opportunity to health outcomes. This systemic gender bias goes beyond outright discrimination and includes stereotypes, assumptions, and expectations which prevent women from living and working in the world on a level playing field with men. Gender inequity affects all of us; when women face unequal opportunity and outcomes, it negatively impacts our children, our families, and our economy.

To achieve gender equity, we must also acknowledge the role that race plays in gender bias. Black and minority women face even greater inequality than their white peers due to the intersection of racial and gender biases. Gender equity and racial equity are inseparable. If we are to successfully achieve gender equity, we must address both issues and how they are interconnected.

## Our Gender Equity Mission:

AISJ works to achieve meaningful and sustainable systems change that advances equity at the intersection of race and gender.

Through the advancement of a bold organizational policy agenda rooted in racial equity and social justice, we seek to go beyond adjustments to the status quo and drive transformational change in public policy, organizational culture, and the public narrative within government, businesses, and our communities.

AISJ engages in advocacy to affirm the value of work traditionally done by women, achieve gender pay equity, ensure equitable health outcomes for women, and elevate women's voices within society. Our work varies by issue but always centers five core policy goals: Intentionality, Integrity, Inclusion, Investment, and Impact.

## Gender Equity Policy Agenda:

- **Valuing Women's Work** – Value the work that women do and acknowledge its importance to our society and economy by ensuring that women, especially minority women, receive equal pay for equal work, address occupational segregation by increasing wages and securing benefits for careers predominantly filled by women, and support women owned businesses through equitable access to funding, capital, and other business supports.
- **Valuing Women's Lives** – Improve health outcomes for women by implementing systems to eliminate bias and discrimination in health care and support advancements in health equity that improve health care access and women's health outcomes.
- **Valuing Women's Voices** – Elevate women's voices by promoting their lived experiences and leadership, and provide data and educational resources highlighting the impact of gender bias and inequity on Alabama's women, children, families, and economy.

## Valuing Women's Work

Alabama Institute for Social Justice fights to ensure that the work of women is equally valued and equitably compensated with that of men, recognized for its importance to our economy and society, and that women receive equitable treatment in the workplace and as entrepreneurs.

### The Problem

Women in the U.S. earn, on average, just 82 cents for every \$1 that men earn. However, this wage gap tends to be more significant for minority women, with Black women averaging 62 cents, Hispanic or Latino women averaging 54 cents and American Indian and Native Alaskan women average 57 cents. Although Asian women as a group average 90 cents for every \$1 that men earn, subgroups within this category earn as little as 50 cents. These wage gap differences reflect how the intersection of both racial and gender biases impose even greater inequality upon minority women.

A variety of factors are behind the gender pay gap including: gender-based wage discrimination, reliance on previous salary history in hiring decisions and differences in hours worked, with women more likely to work part time and less likely to work overtime due to familial obligations. However, one of the most significant contributing factors to the gender pay gap is occupational segregation, where jobs in differing industries are occupied predominantly by one gender or the other based on gender norms and expectations.

Women overwhelmingly occupy jobs in health care, education, child care, the housekeeping industry, and secretarial services. Historically viewed as “women’s work,” and thus of lesser value, women (and men) encounter clear wage penalties for working in these female-dominated occupations. The penalty is even greater for those who work in jobs historically performed by enslaved persons and which, post-slavery, continued to be predominantly filled by Black and brown women.

Faced with these obstacles in the traditional workforce, many women decide to start their own business. Black women entrepreneurs are starting new businesses at a far greater rate than other racial and ethnic groups of both genders. Yet they face deep structural inequities when growing their business and achieving success.

Lack of access to capital and funding, a key predictor of business success, coupled with disparities in how investors assess women and minority-owned businesses serve to negatively impact business growth and success. Women also face a lack of mentorship and networking opportunities when starting their own business while simultaneously facing bias and a lack of representation, particularly when starting businesses in male-dominated industries.

### The Solution

We must truly value women's work and acknowledge its importance to our society and economy by ensuring that women, especially minority women, receive equal pay for equal work, address occupational segregation by increasing wages and securing benefits for careers predominantly filled by women, and support women entrepreneurs.

An Alabama that Values Women's Work will:

- Guarantee women receive equal pay for equal work by ending discriminatory wage and compensation practices.
- Counteract the inequities in occupational segregation by recognizing and rewarding the comparable worth of women-dominated jobs in terms of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions in comparison to male-dominated industries.
- Ensure women-owned businesses have equitable access to funding, capital, and other business supports.

## Valuing Women's Lives

Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to improve health outcomes for women through the implementation of systems to eliminate bias and discrimination in health care and by supporting advancements in health equity that improve health care access and women's health outcomes.

### The Problem

Across the United States women face biases in health care due to their gender. These biases can affect all aspects of patient care and often result in worse patient outcomes for women with patients receiving different diagnoses and treatment, as well as receiving lower quality health care than their male counterparts. Although such disparities impact all women, they are most likely to occur and often have the greatest impact on minority women.

Gender inequity and bias in health care has historical roots and is deeply embed in our health care systems. Throughout history, scientists and medical researchers simply assumed that human biology was the same for both men and women and excluded women from research. Even when women have been included, many research studies into diseases and treatments have disproportionate numbers of male participants. Minority participants are similarly underrepresented.

The United Health Foundation's annual Health of Women and Children Report ranks Alabama 47<sup>th</sup> in overall health outcomes for women and 49<sup>th</sup> in access to women's health providers. The report also identified a high overall mortality rate among Alabamian women ages 20-44.

Meanwhile, the latest figures from the National Center for Health Statistics reveal that Alabama has the third-highest rate of maternal mortality, more than double the national rate with 36.4 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. In the U.S. at large, Black women have a maternal mortality rate more than double that of white or Hispanic women.

Women also face difficulties in accessing health care. Thirteen percent of Alabama women between the ages of 19 and 64 are uninsured. Because Alabama is one of only twelve states that has not expanded Medicaid, one third of uninsured women in Alabama fall into the Medicaid coverage gap. Uninsured women are less likely to receive preventative care, have a regular doctor, and are more likely to receive substandard care when they do access the health care system.

Seventeen hospitals have closed across Alabama in the past decade, with twelve of the state's forty-five rural hospitals identified as "most vulnerable" to closure in the near future. Decreases in rural health care facilities may also contribute to disparities in health care as women bear the overwhelming burden of family and child care responsibilities which they must balance with additional time and transportation costs of seeking care.

## The Solution

Women in Alabama have some of the poorest health care outcomes in the nation and one of the highest mortality rates. This inequity negatively impacts not only women's lives but the lives of our children, our families, and our economy. We must eliminate gender bias and discrimination in health care and support advancements in health equity that improve health care access and women's health outcomes.

An Alabama that Values Women's Lives will:

- Educate health care professionals and the general public on gender bias, how health issues can present differently in women and men, and how to advocate for women within the health care system.
- Expand equitable statewide access to insurance coverage and health care, including access to women's health care specialists.
- Invest in research into Alabama's high mortality rate and overall poor health outcomes for women and fund identified solutions for improvement.
- Ensure that women and minorities are appropriately represented in current and future research studies for diseases and treatments.

## Valuing Women's Voices

Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to elevate women's voices, promoting their lived experiences and leadership, as well as data and educational resources highlighting the impact of gender bias and inequity on Alabama's women, children, families, and economy.

### The Problem

Even before COVID-19, women continued to face obstacles to achieving gender equity both in the workplace and society at large. One key indicator of this continued disparity is the low number of women in leadership positions within government and business across Alabama.

Alabama has the sixth lowest percentage of female state legislators in the country with women comprising just 16 percent of Alabama's legislature, and only 14 percent of the state Senate. Only seven of the 22 members of the Governor's Cabinet are women and just 7 percent of county commissioners.

The situation is no better in Alabama's corporate board rooms. A 2018 analysis by the Birmingham Business Journal noted that not a single one of Alabama's public companies has a woman serving as CEO or equivalent role, and just 15 percent of the total board members across all companies were women. Of the top ten companies with the greatest percentage of women on their boards, the highest percentage on any board was 30 percent. Only four companies had more than one woman on their boards. Not a single board was chaired by a woman.

When women are not fully represented in our government and in our boardrooms, we lose out on the talent, experience, and perspectives of more than 50 percent of the population. Without women's voices at all levels of leadership, we lose out on opportunities to implement practices and policies that can positively impact our families, communities, and economy.

Covid-19 has erected further roadblocks to achieving gender equity. The pandemic has devastated jobs in industries predominantly occupied by women such as child care, hospitality, and frontline health care, resulting in increased percentages of women filing for unemployment in Alabama compared to men. As small businesses have suffered, so too have women entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile, women have taken on the majority of home schooling and unpaid care duties within families, requiring some to leave the workforce to fulfill these new responsibilities. These career absences not only remove talent and experience from the workforce but can cause delays in career advancement and limit women's access to future leadership opportunities.

## The Solution

Even before COVID-19, women continued to face obstacles to achieving gender equity both in the workplace and society at large. Now the pandemic has created new challenges for women and endangered equity gains achieved in recent decades. We must take intentional action towards increasing equity by creating opportunity for women as well as promoting and supporting their leadership and engagement.

An Alabama that Values Women's Voices will:

- Guarantee equitable representation and engagement from women of diverse backgrounds at all levels of corporate and civic life.
- Increase mentorship and leadership opportunities for women of all races and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Ensure that women of diverse backgrounds are involved in the public policy process so that their knowledge and lived experiences are reflected in decision-making.
- Actively support the return of women to the workplace and community as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.



## Why Environmental Justice

Every American, no matter who they are or where they live, deserves to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and live on unpolluted land safe from the environmental extremes occurring due to climate change. Yet minority and low-income communities bear the disproportionate burden of air and water pollution, poor sanitation, the dumping of toxic waste, and impacts of climate change. Longstanding policies of social and racial discrimination have created an unjust system that inequitably distributes environmental harm upon Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor communities.

Minority and low-income communities across Alabama face ongoing harm from pollution and environmental damage and are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events such as flooding and record-setting heat. In addition to facing disproportionate environmental impacts, minority and low-income communities lack the social capital, money, and resources to address the harm caused by existing environmental injustices or prevent new environmentally unjust actions that target their neighborhoods.

## Our Environmental Justice Mission

AISJ works to achieve meaningful and sustainable systems change that addresses the disparities and harm resulting from environmental injustice that Black, Brown, indigenous and low-income communities face.

Through the advancement of a bold organizational policy agenda rooted in racial equity and social justice, we seek to go beyond adjustments to the status quo and drive transformational change in public policy, organizational culture, and the public narrative within government, businesses, and our communities.

AISJ engages in advocacy to promote sound environmental policies and practices and ensure that the decisions made by our local, state, and national elected officials will protect the people and places we love. Our work varies by issue but always centers five core policy goals: Intentionality, Integrity, Inclusion, Investment, and Impact.

## Environmental Justice Policy Agenda

- **Center Justice and Equity Within Environmental Action** – Change the approach to environmental policy to prevent disadvantaged communities from being disproportionately harmed and ensure that justice and equity are priorities in law-making, regulation, and social action.
- **Repair Environmental Harm** – Take restorative action to repair damage to the local environment from pollution and address environmental health disparities within minority and low-income communities impacted by longstanding environmental injustices.
- **Protect Communities from Climate Change** – Invest in minority and low-income communities, creating plans for long-term resiliency, and building the necessary infrastructure to lessen the impacts of climate change and prevent future harm.

## Center Justice and Equity within Environmental Action

The existing governmental approach to environmental policy is insufficient to address the extent and severity of environmental injustice that minority and low-income communities face. Alabama Institute for Social Justice works to change environmental policy to prevent disadvantaged communities from being disproportionately harmed and ensure that justice and equity are priorities in law-making, regulation, and social action.

### The Problem

Despite decades of policy aimed at reducing pollution and improving environmental quality, minorities have not seen the same benefits as their white counterparts. Black, brown and Indigenous communities continue to suffer disproportionate negative health and environmental impacts from pollution, chemical exposure, and climate impacts in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

New research<sup>1</sup> has confirmed that minorities are exposed to higher levels of dangerous particulate matter from industry, light-duty vehicles, diesel-powered heavy trucks and construction. These fine particles, can become embedded in the lungs and are responsible for between 85,000 and 200,000 premature deaths in the U.S. annually. Exposure to this particulate matter is 21 percent higher for Black Americans, 18 percent higher for Asian Americans and 11 percent higher for Hispanic Americans than average. Meanwhile, exposure rates for White Americans are 8 percent lower than average. Separate research<sup>2</sup> has identified that urban tree cover is on average 15.2 percent lower for low-income census blocks compared to high income ones, resulting in temperatures that are hotter by an average of 1.5°C

The environmental disparities between minority and white populations can be traced to decades of racially discriminatory policy which created segregated communities surrounded by industrial factories and highways. This legacy of structural racism has ensured that minority communities continue to suffer environmental harm even when overall exposure to pollution and other environmental hazards has decreased. Health conditions related to poverty, coupled with a lack of access to quality health care may also compound the harm from exposure to environmental hazards in some communities.

Yet minority communities face an uphill battle in proving these environmental injustices. A lack of political and economic power, resulting from racial discrimination and poverty, often prevents residents from participating in environmental policy decision-making and implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Science Advances. PM2.5 pollutants disproportionately and systemically affect people of color in the United States. 28 Apr 2021. Vol 7, Issue 18. [www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abf4491](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abf4491)

<sup>2</sup> PLOS One. The tree cover and temperature disparity in US urbanized areas: Quantifying the association with income across 5,723 communities. McDonald, Robert I. et. al 21 April, 2021. [journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0249715](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0249715)

## The Solution

For too long our state and national environmental policies have unequally distributed the burden of pollution, toxic waste, and climate change on minority and low-income communities. At the same time, government policies have created health and social inequities within disadvantaged communities which are exacerbated by these negative environmental conditions. In order to achieve environmental justice, policy-making must center the experiences and needs of historically disenfranchised communities and commit to ensuring equitable outcomes.

Centering Justice and Equity within Environmental Action will:

- Elevate and empower the voices of minority and low-income communities directly impacted by environmental injustice and ensure they have a leading role in environmental policy formation.
- Prioritize the needs of disadvantaged communities most impacted by a history of environmental injustice when making environmental policy.
- Prevent further environmental harm to disproportionately impacted communities and improve future environmental outcomes for all communities.
- Invest in mitigation and resiliency efforts to address the legacy of environmental harm within impacted communities.

## Repair Environmental Harm

Alabama Institute for Social Justice advocates for restorative action to repair damage to the local environment from pollution and address environmental health disparities within minority and low-income communities impacted by longstanding environmental injustices.

### The Problem

For decades minority and low-income communities have borne the disproportionate burden of air and water pollution, poor sanitation, and the dumping of toxic waste. Numerous studies have documented that Black communities throughout the South are hosts to disproportionately high numbers of hazardous waste sites.

Uniontown, Alabama is one such community, where the Arrowhead Landfill has become the disposal site for 4 million tons of coal ash and continues to advertise as a disposal site for additional coal ash, asbestos, and contaminants. Coal ash particulates, which contain pollutants such as arsenic, mercury, and lead can travel deep into the lungs. Despite the coal ash being designated a hazardous substance while located in the white community of its origin, it was classified as non-hazardous upon arrival in Uniontown.

As is often the case in such communities, the coal ash site is not the only environmental hazard in Uniontown. A nearby industrial plant deposits wastewater into the city's deteriorating and leaky sewer system which sprays partially treated sewer water into the air and leaks into nearby streams. The coal ash mound, sewer system, and other local industrial facilities emit noxious odors into the air.

Surrounded by industrial plants which have polluted the local environment with hazardous waste, water pollution, carcinogenic emissions, and contaminated soil, part of North Birmingham was designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as a Superfund site due to elevated levels of lead, arsenic and other carcinogens. In addition to the soil contamination recognized by the EPA, the community has identified other health concerns including sinus and upper respiratory tract infections as well as increased symptoms of asthma, COPD, and cancer.

This primarily Black community, with lower-than-average annual incomes, a significant percentage of people living below the poverty level, and low rates of health insurance was kept racially segregated by zoning ordinances for decades as a matter of government policy.

Existing environmental policy has failed to adequately or equitably address the environmental justice communities such as Uniontown and North Birmingham face. Uniontown residents protested against the disposal of coal ash within their community; but the Alabama Department of Environmental Management approved the location despite their concerns. In North Birmingham, toxic cleanup still continues nearly ten years after designation as a Superfund site. Despite meeting the requirements to be placed on the Superfund program's National Priorities List, the site remains unlisted.

## The Solution

Minority and low-income communities across Alabama face ongoing harm from pollution and environmental damage. Longstanding policies of social and racial discrimination have created an unjust system that inequitably distributes environmental harm upon Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor communities. We can no longer wait to take restorative action against the environmental harm caused by the injustice of these policies.

Alabama Institute for Social Justice advocates for restorative action to repair damage to the local environment from pollution and address environmental health disparities within minority and low-income communities impacted by longstanding environmental injustices.

Repairing Environmental Harm will:

- End ongoing pollution from existing industrial and hazardous waste facilities.
- Cleanup remaining pollution and toxic chemicals within the impacted communities and restore environmental quality.
- Invest in infrastructure to support safe sanitation and community health.
- Equitably address health disparities within communities that have been exposed to environmental hazards.

## Protect Communities from Climate Change

Alabama Institute for Social Justice advocates for both government and private investment in minority and low-income communities impacted by climate change including the creation and implementation of plans for long-term resiliency and construction of necessary infrastructure to lessen the current impacts and prevent future harm.

### The Problem

Climate change is here. Global temperatures are rising, glaciers are melting causing rising sea levels, weather patterns are shifting, and extreme weather events are increasing. These changes are projected to increase in both scope and number in the decades to come, affecting all aspects of our lives from our health, to our economy, to the environments in which we live.

But the effects of climate change will not be equally felt by all Americans. Low-income and minority communities are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to systemic historical and social factors that make them least able to prepare for, manage, and recover from harm.

A September 2021 report by the Environmental Protection Agency, *Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts*<sup>3</sup>, analyzed the impacts of climate change on various populations in scenarios with 2°C of global warming<sup>4</sup> or 50 cm of global sea level rise.

The report found that while low-income populations in general are at relatively greater risk of the impacts of climate change than those of higher-income, minority populations are the most likely to live in areas with the highest projected levels of climate change impacts. Black individuals have the highest risk.

Black individuals are more likely than others to live in communities facing the highest increases in childhood asthma diagnoses from climate-driven changes in particulate matter; the highest increases in mortality rates due to climate-driven changes in extreme temperatures; and the highest rates of labor hour losses for weather-exposed workers due to extreme temperatures.

And Black individuals are 40 percent more likely than other groups to live in locations where extreme temperatures driven by climate change will result in higher mortality rates. In the Southeast alone, 2°C of global warming is projected to result in an annual increase of 1,900 premature deaths from climate-driven changes in particulate matter.

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<sup>3</sup> EPA. 2021. Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA 430-R-21-003. [www.epa.gov/cira/social-vulnerability-report](https://www.epa.gov/cira/social-vulnerability-report)

<sup>4</sup> Using a baseline period from 1986 to 2005. The world has warmed by an increase of 0.65°C since the baseline.

## The Solution

The data is clear. Climate change will have disproportionately negative health and environmental impacts on low-income and minority populations least able to prepare for, manage, and recover from harm. Black communities will be hit the hardest. We must develop plans for climate change resiliency and invest in infrastructure to lessen the impacts of climate change and prevent future harm.

Protecting Communities from Climate Change will:

- Engage frontline communities in identification of both the challenges they face due to climate change and solutions to those challenges.
- Prevent community displacement whenever possible and provide appropriate supports for populations displaced by climate change.
- Ensure disaster and climate change preparedness and relief funding is directed to communities in an equitable manner, accounting for risk disparities and population vulnerabilities.
- Address shelter, transportation, health, and workforce challenges arising from both the decrease in environmental quality and increase in natural disasters associated with climate change.