



2022 Action Agenda

Alabama Institute for Social Justice (AISJ) is committed to achieving meaningful and sustainable systems change in support of under-resourced children and families in Alabama's Black Belt. With a focus on the policy issues of child care, voter engagement, gender equity, and environmental justice, AISJ seeks to ensure a seamless transition for human success from birth through adulthood. Through collective action rooted in racial equity and social justice, we work to drive transformational change and address institutional and structural inequities that particularly limit and undermine the economic well-being of women and people of color.

AISJ's 2022 action agenda highlights the current policy landscape in Alabama and the direction of our work over the next year to advance systemic change in public policy, organizational culture, and the public narrative within our government, businesses, and communities.

Child Care

Child care is critical infrastructure that provides an essential service for our families, communities, and economy. However, the child care system is significantly underfunded and underresourced at both national and state levels. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama's child care industry was, at best, fragile, and in underserved communities it was on life support. Today, however, Alabama child care is in a state of crisis as it struggles to recover from the pandemic which only exacerbated systemic inequities.

Alabama has received nearly \$1 billion in supplemental funding via the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act, to support the child care industry throughout the pandemic. However, these investments and their subsequent delivery implementation have unfortunately failed to provide sustained and sufficient relief for child care providers and families, particularly those who were already underfunded and under resourced. The lack of both stakeholder engagement and comprehensive planning and analysis has resulted in funding outlays that have been neither as timely nor as targeted as the industry has needed during this crisis. Likewise, the opportunity has been missed to address key failings of the current system.

2022 Actions

- Advocate for a new system of child care at both the state and federal levels by, 1) supporting legislation that fully funds the actual cost of providing high-quality early care and education, while ensuring both accessibility and affordability for all families and 2) by uplifting the voices

and experiences of child care providers through The Alabama Movement for Child Care (TAMCC) and public education campaigns.

- Seek answers and increased accountability around state expenditure and implementation of federal pandemic funding for child care, including the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act; and improve the implementation of outstanding federal funds that are not yet obligated.
- Work to ensure that state implementation of any future federal child care funding adheres to higher implementation standards and best practices, including robust stakeholder engagement and comprehensive analysis of both systemic challenges and industry needs.

Voter Engagement

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. Many of the civil rights reforms of the mid-twentieth century, which sought to remove and prevent obstacles to voting rooted in a legacy of racial discrimination and voter intimidation, have recently been overturned.

In the wake of record-high turnout among Black and minority voters in the 2020 election, state legislative efforts to limit voting, particularly targeted at Black and minority voters, have intensified. In addition to passing numerous bills aimed at restricting voting access that disproportionately impact voters of color and enable partisan interference in election administration, the Alabama legislature also drew Congressional redistricting maps that diluted the influence of Black voters, limiting the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice.

2022 Actions

- Raise awareness of and advocate against legislation and policies reminiscent of Jim Crow era prohibitions on voting, threaten our democracy, and seek to diminish and silence the voices of Black and other marginalized citizens.

- Work to counteract generations of voter suppression and intimidation efforts that continue today by conducting voter registration drives, educational programs, and community engagement actions, ensuring voters can exercise their constitutional right to vote and have their vote counted.

Environmental Justice

During the 2022 Special Session, the Alabama State Legislature voted to use \$225 million of State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds provided through the American Rescue Plan Act for water and sewer improvement projects across the state, including \$5 million in grants for the installation of wastewater systems in the Alabama Black Belt and other rural areas that are struggling with inadequate wastewater treatment and collection systems. Alabama will also receive millions of dollars through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, including \$782 million over five years to improve water infrastructure, and additional funds to address legacy pollution and increase community resiliency to climate change.

However, both Alabama and the nation have a long history of injustice when implementing previous environmental cleanup and improvement programs. Longstanding policies of social and racial discrimination have created an unjust system that inequitably imposes environmental harm upon Black, Brown, Indigenous, and poor communities. Despite decades of policy aimed at reducing pollution and improving environmental quality, minorities have not received the same benefits as their white counterparts. Intentionality will be necessary to overcome this legacy and ensure equitable investment of these funds to address the ongoing harm that minority and low-income communities across Alabama face from pollution and environmental damage.

2022 Actions

- Advocate for distribution of current and future American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds in a manner that centers environmental equity and rectifies the historic harms perpetuated in the Black Belt region, especially upon Black and minority residents.
- Ensure that state implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds center the experiences and needs of historically disenfranchised communities and commit to ensuring equitable outcomes through prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged communities that have been most heavily impacted by a history of environmental injustice.

Gender Equity

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, women already faced obstacles to achieving gender equity both in the workplace and society at large; the World Economic Forum estimated it would take an entire century to achieve gender equity. As we enter the third year of the pandemic, those estimates have now increased, indicating that COVID-19 has set the fight for gender equity back nearly four decades. The pandemic devastated jobs in industries predominantly occupied by women and forced other women to leave the workforce to take on new home schooling and unpaid care duties. Meanwhile, minority and rural women have disproportionately suffered from the health impacts of COVID-19 due to existing health disparities and lack of affordable and accessible health care.

During the 2022 Special Session, the Alabama State Legislature voted to use \$30 million of State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds provided through the American Rescue Plan Act to assist rural hospitals. Another \$117 million was allocated to address pandemic-related health care services. Alabama is also slated to receive billions of dollars in federal investment through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. As we seek to recover from the pandemic, it is critical that we invest in programs and policies that not only address the progress lost due to COVID-19 but actively speed up the pre- pandemic timeline to advance gender equity and support Alabama's women and families.

2022 Actions

- Implement the Judge Tiffany B. McCord “Just Like You” Empowerment Program in cooperation with Title I schools to empower and encourage girls to reach their full potential by introducing them to local women who represent their own ethnic backgrounds in all types of careers, thereby expanding their expectations and knowledge of what is possible for their own lives.
- Advocate for the implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and other available federal funds to advance gender equity and improve the lives of women across rural Alabama and the Black Belt.
- Advocate for Medicaid expansion to improve health equity and outcomes for Alabama's most underserved individuals and families, and support the recommendation by the Alabama Maternal Mortality Review Committee that Medicaid be extended for postpartum coverage from the current 60 days to a total of 12 months.