



## ABOUT OUR POLICY AGENDA 2016-17

This is a living document of the issues United Way of the Bay Area actively advocates on to effect systems change. Harnessing the power and reach of the United Way network, UWBA influences public policy at all levels of government – local and regional, state, and federal. While UWBA works in partnership with our state and national associations to advance the policy priorities of the United Way network as a unified voice, from time to time, we will advocate on issues we have identified as key to our UWBA mission in our community, and for which the United Way network may not have adopted a formal position. Therefore, the positions declared on this document reflect UWBA's policy agenda, and should not necessarily be attributed to other local United Ways, United Ways of California, or United Way Worldwide.

Throughout the year, we may add other issues to our policy agenda that are aligned with our organizational goal to end the cycle of poverty. This living document also allows for flexibility to shift priorities when needed.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

**Benefits Cliff:** Working individuals in poverty may have earnings that are just high enough to disqualify them from public benefits, but still not enough for them to afford food, housing, child care and health care. Benefit limit tests penalize people who begin moving out of poverty by terminating their benefits when their income, value of assets or real property increase beyond eligibility limits. UWBA supports replacing the 'benefits cliff' with rational policies that gradually and sensibly ramp down benefits as a family's income or resources increase.

**Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance:** The federal EITC has pulled 1.3 million people, including 629,000 children, above the federal poverty line within California from 2010-12. California's new state EITC will further help reduce poverty and boost economic growth in our local communities by leveraging the federal EITC. UWBA supports successful implementation and future expansion of the California EITC, reauthorization of federal EITC and Child Tax Credit improvements, and expansion of VITA.

**Housing:** Housing is a key component of economic success – yet affordable housing is increasingly out of reach for many individuals and families. California's lowest income renters spend a median of 68% of income on rent, leaving little left for food, transportation, child care expenses, and other needs. While every county in the state has an affordable housing shortfall, the Bay Area's lack of supply has become so acute that both low and middle income households face an affordability crisis. Recognizing the critical role of housing access and affordability in addressing and preventing poverty, UWBA will advocate for policies and

programs that not only increase the supply of housing, but also improve conditions for low and moderate-income families to secure safe and affordable housing.

**Minimum Wage:** Wages for the lowest paid workers in the Bay Area have failed to keep up with the sharp increase in the cost of living. Raising the minimum wage can provide immediate financial relief for low-wage workers and their families and raises their standard of living to help meet basic needs like housing, food, health care and child care. UWBA supports minimum wage policies that help low-wage individuals and families close the gap between living in poverty and achieving self-sufficiency.

**Two Generation Approach:** Our SparkPoint Community Schools offer everything from food pantries to dental checkups to afterschool programs and business classes for parents. In line with our programmatic focus on family economic support in community schools, UWBA supports policies that improve the immediate and long-term financial stability of parents while ensuring that children are healthy and supported at school so that the entire family can thrive.

**Education + Workforce Development:** The education and workforce systems have been challenged by lack of coordination and silos among institutions and programs. Improved alignment within the education and workforce systems can lead to more effective strategies that address the widening skills gap. UWBA supports education and workforce policies and strategies that lead to better alignment and better outcomes for individuals to be career-ready.

## OTHER POLICY POSITIONS

**Charitable Deduction:** Preserving the current charitable deduction is key to ensuring that tax-payers who itemize their taxes are able to fully deduct their charitable contributions at a rate equal to their tax rate. Preserving the deduction enables non-profits to continue to fund and provide services that advance the common good. The United Way network advocates to protect the charitable deduction in the federal income tax.

**Combined Federal Campaign:** The CFC is the world's largest annual workplace charity campaign – federal employees raise millions of dollars each year to support eligible non-profit organizations that provide health and human service benefits throughout the world. We inform Congress on the United Way network's concerns regarding proposed changes by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

**Common Core:** Reinforce support for new Common Core State Standards already adopted and in statute in California and 46 other states. The state's new standards will benefit students by having fewer, clearer, and deeper standards and require a greater use of analysis, critical thinking and real-world skills.

**Early Care and Education:** ECE state funding was cut by \$1 billion during the recession. UWBA advocates for ECE reinvestment – more state funding for early care and education and increase in the number of subsidized child care slots.

**Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP):** The United Way network advocates for maintenance or increase of federal funding which supports food banks, shelters, and other safety net services.

**Funding for Children's Services:** Support expansion of children's funds in more Bay Area cities and counties to provide for a strong source of funding regionally dedicated to children's needs and services, and help level the playing field for children living in poverty.

**Local Control Funding Formula:** UWBA supported passage of LCFF in 2013 and is invested in ensuring the successful implementation of LCFF for English Language Learners, foster kids, and low-income students.

**Health for All:** At a time when more people than ever before are gaining access to affordable health care through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), health care coverage remains inaccessible for many who still cannot afford a health plan or lack immigration status. UWBA supports California's recent decision to cover all children irrespective of immigration status. We continue to advocate to expand health for all adults.

**Immigration Reform:** Immigrants without legal status account for an estimated 10 percent of the labor force in California. Despite high workforce participation, immigrants face significant obstacles to economic advancement and are especially vulnerable to poverty. UWBA supports immigration reform policies that provide opportunities for all immigrants, irrespective of legal status, to achieve economic success and a pathway to citizenship.

**Supplemental Poverty Measure:** The current measure of poverty, known as the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) was designed in 1964 and aside from minor adjustments for inflation, has not been significantly updated since. UWBA supports federal adoption of SPM to take the local cost of living into account in determining eligibility thresholds for public benefits.