

## Agenda for the common good

# Ensuring support for Iowans in times of need

Too many Iowa kids and families lack the resources they need to survive day to day — food on the table, adequate housing, reliable transportation to work and doctor’s visits. This reality is shaped by historical and present-day public policies that concentrate opportunity, income and wealth within certain communities at the expense of others. The result: One in 7 working households in our state can’t meet basic needs on wages alone.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone deserves adequate nutritious, culturally appropriate foods by virtue of being alive. Hunger is a policy choice. Protecting safety-net programs is an essential element of a larger campaign for racial, economic, gender and environmental justice.

**To build a future where every Iowan has the resources they need to learn, work and thrive, we must act. We know policies that work:**

### Streamline help in times of need

Requirements to apply for assistance can be cumbersome, even without additional burdens that some legislators are attempting to impose. We should be working to ensure that people eligible for benefits can more easily access support for their families and communities.

Lawmakers should:

- ▶ **Reject barriers that take food away from Iowans**, including SNAP work reporting requirements and redundant eligibility verification checks.
- ▶ **Ensure Iowans can get the food they need** through accessible SNAP application and re-enrollment processes.

### What voters & lawmakers need to know

- ▶ **Our economy leaves too many Iowans behind.** Wages, which often lag behind increases in the cost of living, do not reflect the value workers add to the economy.<sup>2</sup> This means companies profit from worker productivity instead of fairly distributing it to workers in the form of better wages and benefits.
- ▶ **Because policymakers have failed to structure an economy that works for everyone, a humane safety net is essential.** Public supports — from SNAP to tax credits — have proven effective at helping low-wage workers, especially families with children. But we have not closed the gap, and too many Iowans still fall through the cracks. Federal aid during the pandemic showed that we can act to meet the needs of families in times of crisis.
- ▶ **Proposals to ramp up duplicative paperwork** requirements to apply for and maintain benefits for programs like SNAP and Medicaid would make it harder for marginalized families to get the food and health care they need to meet family and work responsibilities. Red tape cuts food and health care from eligible people, particularly those who move frequently due of high housing costs, work multiple jobs at all hours, or need extra time to get paperwork translated into their home language.
- ▶ **Discussions of income or wealth inequality are incomplete** without acknowledging the U.S. history of confiscation of Indigenous land and stolen labor of enslaved people, which laid the groundwork for the industrial economy of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> These inequalities show today in racialized wealth gaps, housing crises and food insecurity.<sup>4</sup>

## Invest in SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as food assistance in Iowa, is the most effective tool we have for addressing hunger in our state. SNAP has an economic multiplier effect — for every dollar spent on SNAP, \$1.54 is pumped into local Iowa economies.<sup>5</sup> In Iowa more than 69% of SNAP participants are in families with children.<sup>6</sup> Having access to adequate food has a profound impact on child development, educational attainment, prevention of disease, and lifetime earnings. SNAP frees up other dollars in a family budget to help cover other needs like rent, child care, school supplies and household goods.

Lawmakers should:

- ▶ **Invest in Iowa's Double Up Food Bucks** program, which doubles the value of SNAP dollars spent on fresh fruits and vegetables.
- ▶ **Expand gross income eligibility for SNAP to 200% of the federal poverty level**, up from the current 160%, to better reflect the prevalence of food insecurity and what it really takes to meet basic needs on wages alone.

## Boost tax credits

Tax credits are an important way to help families bridge the gap between low wages and a basic budget. They have a proven track record of keeping

children out of poverty, rewarding work instead of wealth and compensating for regressive elements of our tax structure, such as sales and property taxes, that hit low-wage families the hardest.

Lawmakers should:

- ▶ **Double the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** from 15% to 30% of the federal credit.
- ▶ **Create a meaningful, refundable state child tax credit** that helps offset the high costs of raising children by converting Iowa's meager dependent "exemption credits."
- ▶ **Fund the low-income renters' and homeowners' property tax credit** to help people of who are not eligible for the EITC.

## Make work pay for marginalized workers

Along with strengthening our safety net, we must put more wages in the pockets of low-wage workers, so fewer live on the edge of crisis. We should: Raise the minimum wage, restore unemployment insurance for Iowans faced with a sudden job loss, and enforce and expand penalties for employers who steal wages from employees.

Check out Common Good Iowa's Policy Wise fact sheet on strengthening Iowa's workforce for more on these strategies.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Fisher and Natalie Veldhouse, "The Cost of Living in Iowa 2022: Many households working hard, but barely scraping by." April 2022. Common Good Iowa. [https://www.commongoodiowa.org/media/cms/220427\\_Cost\\_of\\_Living\\_2022\\_FINAL\\_E5F2092545A1E.pdf](https://www.commongoodiowa.org/media/cms/220427_Cost_of_Living_2022_FINAL_E5F2092545A1E.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Economic Policy Institute, "The Productivity-Pay Gap," August 2021. <https://www.epi.org/productivity-pay-gap/>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Desmond, "In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation." August 2019. New York Times, 1619 project. [https://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/full\\_issue\\_of\\_the\\_1619\\_project.pdf](https://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/full_issue_of_the_1619_project.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Janelle Jones, "The racial wealth gap: How African Americans have been shortchanged out of the materials to build wealth." February 2017. Economic Policy Institute. [https://www.epi.org/blog/the-racial-wealth-](https://www.epi.org/blog/the-racial-wealth-gap-how-african-americans-have-been-shortchanged-out-of-the-materials-to-build-wealth/)

[gap-how-african-americans-have-been-shortchanged-out-of-the-materials-to-build-wealth/](https://www.epi.org/blog/the-racial-wealth-gap-how-african-americans-have-been-shortchanged-out-of-the-materials-to-build-wealth/)

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Canning and Rosanna Mentzer Morrison, "Quantifying the Impact of SNAP Benefits on the U.S. Economy and Jobs," July 2019. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/july/quantifying-the-impact-of-snap-benefits-on-the-u-s-economy-and-jobs/#:~:text=A%20recent%20ERS%20analysis%20finds,and%20beyond%20the%20new%20benefits.>

<sup>6</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Iowa Food Assistance Program fact sheet," April 2022. [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap\\_factsheet\\_iowa.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_iowa.pdf)