



NC Justice Center

*Opportunity and Prosperity for All*

2007

# Legislative Agenda

In today's economy, many families in North Carolina struggle to make ends meet. Median wages are stagnant, employer-provided health coverage is more expensive and less available, and critical programs are underfunded because of revenue shortfalls. In addition, the state's tax system has become increasingly unfair,

disproportionately hitting those same struggling families. The NC General Assembly must help North Carolina's working families move toward economic security and protect the state's most vulnerable people. Implementing this agenda will increase opportunity and prosperity for all the people of North Carolina.

## ■ Increase Access to Affordable Housing

Nearly 740,000 North Carolina households – including families, the elderly and the disabled – lack affordable, safe housing.

- Provide annual funding of \$50 million to the NC Housing Trust Fund to increase the availability of affordable housing.
- Expand the NC Home Protection Pilot Program, which helps displaced workers avoid home foreclosure.
- Improve state landlord-tenant laws to protect tenants from abuses and discrimination.
- Increase funding for the Minority Economic Development appropriations package.

## ■ Help Workers in Transition

Workers need training and support to enable them to prosper in North Carolina's changing economy.

- Fully fund the component parts of the unemployment insurance system, including the insurance trust fund, employment services, ESC operations and the Worker Training Trust Fund.

- Increase the accessibility and affordability of postsecondary education for low-income working adults.
- Establish a program to provide health insurance for laid-off workers.

## ■ Help Moderate-Wage Families

Stagnant wages have left many working families struggling to afford the rising costs of basic necessities.

- Provide funds to eliminate the waiting list for child-care subsidies.
- Require businesses receiving state incentives to provide benefits, pay living wages and target economically disadvantaged communities.
- Improve health and safety protections for migrant workers.
- Raise the state minimum wage closer to a living wage and index it to inflation.
- Repeal the prohibition on collective bargaining by public employees.

## ■ Protect Consumers

North Carolina has led the country in protecting consumers, but new predatory lending practices threaten working families.

- Protect consumers against all forms of predatory lending.
- Maintain the state's 36% interest rate cap on payday loans and other small consumer and credit enhancement loans.
- Expand consumer protections for homeowners facing foreclosure.
- Improve laws regulating manufactured housing.
- Improve protections against unsuitable and predatory home mortgage loans.
- Assure that all people in North Carolina can obtain affordable, reliable utility service.
- Increase funding for civil legal services for the low-income individuals.

## ■ Improve Access to Health Care

More than 1.3 million North Carolinians have no health insurance. In addition, current services for the elderly and disabled are inadequate to meet the needs of these quickly growing populations.

- Guarantee affordable health coverage for all children.
- Establish a high-risk insurance pool to provide affordable coverage for people with serious health conditions.
- Increase funding by \$5 million annually for the Home and Community Care Block Grant.
- Strengthen and increase funding for the Community Alternatives Program for Disabled Adults.
- Increase the medically needy income standard from its current level of \$242 per month to the national average of \$461 per month.
- Allocate additional funding to ensure appropriate treatment and placement for persons with mental illnesses, developmental disabilities and substance abuse problems.

## ■ Improve Tax Fairness and Adequacy

North Carolina's tax system is unfair, out-of-date, and inadequate to meet the needs of North Carolina's growing population.

- Increase tax fairness and support workers by implementing a state Earned Income Tax Credit equal to at least 10 percent of the federal credit.

- Ensure that corporations pay their fair share of taxes by adopting a "combined reporting" system for multi-state corporations and by maintaining the current tax rate on corporate profits.
- Maintain the current 8-percent income tax rate on household income above \$200,000.
- Reform the tax system so that revenues grow with the economy and can meet state needs.

## ■ Build a Better Public Education System

In spite of recent improvements, North Carolina schools are not yet providing all students with their constitutionally required "sound basic education."

- Increase funding for the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund and implement criteria defining allowable fund purposes and accountability procedures.
- Ensure that all students who are at risk of academic failure have a written personal education plan that is implemented and monitored regularly.
- Reduce the high suspension and drop-out rates for all students, with particular focus on the needs of minority students, who disproportionately are suspended or drop out.
- Ensure all students are academically prepared to meet the state's new graduation standards by providing them with the resources necessary to be successful.

## ■ Government and Lobby Reforms

The lobbying and ethics reforms of the last two years now must be taken to the next level to ensure fair, open and sound government in North Carolina.

- Expand public campaign financing to Council of State races.
- Restrict lobbyists from raising money for elected officials.
- Strengthen the independent ethics commission.

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