



North Carolina Justice Center

*Opportunity and Prosperity for All*

## AGENDA 2012:

# North Carolina Can Do Better

**N**orth Carolina's citizens are justifiably proud of its many accomplishments. Throughout the last several decades, a strong and steady commitment to invest in public structures, systems and solutions has lifted North Carolina above its southeastern neighbors in critical areas like education, infrastructure, health, the environment, the social safety net and quality of life generally.

Now that progress is in grave jeopardy. The combination of the Great Recession, a damaging series of shortsighted "cuts only" budget decisions and ignoring needed tax reform is dragging the state toward the bottom in category after category. The result: crowded classrooms with overworked teachers, huge tuition hikes and fewer opportunities in higher education, a crumbling and increasingly obsolete transportation system, polluted water, and a health care system in which the uninsured cannot afford or find health insurance. Inequality continues

to rise, with the middle class fast becoming a memory instead of the engine of prosperity. As low- and moderate-income North Carolinians fall even further behind, we have to do more to create opportunity for those on the unfortunate end of the economic spectrum. To do so would not only create a fairer economy, it would maximize North Carolina's economic potential.

Fortunately, it is not too late. Though battered by the hard economic times, North Carolina remains resilient. We have the economic and human resources necessary to change course and to return to the steady progress of the last century.

But we cannot cut our way back to broad-based middle class prosperity or wait for it to trickle down from on high. Instead, we must come together and renew our shared commitment to common good solutions that emphasize investing in our future.

### Restore Critical Public Investments and Modernize the State's Revenue System

- ➔ Restore funding to programs, services and infrastructure critical to the state's future, particularly:
  - maintain Medicaid optional services critical to low-income older adults and persons with disabilities,
  - replace lost federal funding for classrooms with state dollars, and
  - fund indigent defense and Legal Services.
- ➔ Strengthen the state Earned Income Tax Credit to ensure working poor families don't pay a greater share of their income in state and local taxes than the state's wealthiest households.
- ➔ Require a tax incidence analysis (i.e., showing the impact of taxes on taxpayers of different income levels) for the entire state and local tax systems every two years and for any proposed changes that would alter revenues by more than \$20 million.
- ➔ Ensure the state's revenue system raises adequate revenue, doesn't ask more from those least able to pay and is better able to weather economic downturns.

### Put People Back to Work

- ➔ Create a work-sharing program to stem layoffs, preserve the skills of NC's workers and reduce the costs to employers.
- ➔ Extend NC's successful wage subsidy program to encourage employers to expand their payroll and hire low-income, unemployed workers.
- ➔ Ensure that all corporate subsidy programs have meaningful wage standards and require hiring of the long-term unemployed for all new jobs.

### Support and Protect Workers

- ➔ Sustain funding for child care subsidies that provide affordable, quality child care for low-income workers and those pursuing work and additional educational training.
- ➔ Protect existing collective bargaining rights for North Carolina workers, and repeal the prohibition of collective bargaining for public employees.
- ➔ Reduce abusive employment practices such as misclassification of workers as independent contractors and non-payment of wages or "wage theft".

- ➔ Ensure NC's Unemployment Insurance system is adequately funded and does not cut or restrict needed assistance for individuals out of work through no fault of their own.

### Improve NC's Health Care System

- ➔ Protect and improve programs for the most vulnerable individuals and families like Medicaid and Community Care.
- ➔ Implement national health reform in NC quickly and fairly to reduce health costs and improve access for everyone.
- ➔ Establish a Health Benefits Exchange with strong consumer protections and provisions to prevent conflicts of interest.

### Protect Tenants, Consumers, Homeowners and Homebuyers

- ➔ Stop attempts by the consumer finance industry and other lenders to increase rates and fees on consumer loans.
- ➔ Protect homeowners from unfair and abusive practices by Home Owner Associations.
- ➔ Provide relief to consumers and business owners from damaging utility bills from Municipal Power Agencies.
- ➔ Stop attempts by utilities to pass Construction Work In Progress (CWIP) legislation.
- ➔ Stop attempts to weaken protections against foreclosure rescue scams and harmful contracts for deeds and lease option contracts.
- ➔ Stop attempts to shift bed bug eradication to tenants and ensure tenants have at least 10 days to remove personal property after eviction.
- ➔ Maintain limited wage garnishment for the collection of judgments.

### Increase Access to Services and Safe, Decent and Affordable Housing

- ➔ Restore funding to the NC Housing Trust Fund.
- ➔ Ensure fair and adequate access to utility services and energy efficiency programs.
- ➔ Provide funding for integrated and supported housing options for people with disabilities.

### Ensure a Sound Basic Education for All Children

- ➔ Provide adequate funding for appropriate educational services for all NC students, including low-income and minority students.

- ➔ Ensure that at-risk four-year olds receive an excellent preschool education.
- ➔ Prevent the privatization of public education through the use of vouchers and public charter schools which are competition rather than compliments to traditional public schools.
- ➔ Ensure that students with Limited English Proficiency and English language learners have access to constitutionally mandated education.
- ➔ Ensure that funding for the NC Community College system covers increased enrollment and maintains low-income students' access to state need-based grants and federal student loans on all campuses to increase the number of North Carolinians with post-secondary educations.

### Protect and Improve Civil Rights and Access to the Courts

- ➔ Restore and increase funding for civil legal services.
- ➔ Raise the presumptive age for adult criminal prosecution to 18.
- ➔ End wasteful spending on ineffective and harmful local enforcement of federal immigration laws.
- ➔ Provide adequate funding for interpreting services for civil litigants.
- ➔ End capital punishment for people with severe mental illness.
- ➔ Maintain the protections of NC's Racial Justice Act.

### Address the Barriers to Re-entry for Individuals with Criminal Convictions

- ➔ Expand opportunities for the expunction of criminal records.
- ➔ Establish local re-entry councils that provide a coordinated delivery system of services to individuals with criminal records.
- ➔ Ensure that relevant factors are considered by occupational licensing boards when evaluating individuals with a criminal record.

### Ensure Good Government and the Right to Vote

- ➔ Protect and expand public campaign financing to lessen special interest money in the electoral process.
- ➔ Protect the right of low income, elderly and disabled North Carolinians to vote by rejecting unnecessary, costly and discriminatory obstacles to voting like mandatory photo IDs.
- ➔ Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission to draw legislative and congressional districts.

For more information contact:

**BILL ROWE - General Counsel/Director of Advocacy:** [bill@ncjustice.org](mailto:bill@ncjustice.org), 919/856-2177

**NORTH CAROLINA JUSTICE CENTER • 919/856-2570 • [www.ncjustice.org](http://www.ncjustice.org)**