

- Increase funding to expand the number of high quality Pre-Kindergarten seats available in New Orleans and across the state.
- Restore state funding to Louisiana's colleges and universities.
- Modify the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) so that it awards students financial assistance based on both merit *and* financial need.
- Secure state funding to allow implementation of high quality assessments to help schools and families gain valuable information on student academic performance to better support their academic success.
- The Louisiana Department of Education must release disaggregated student performance data so that families can make well-informed decisions about their education options. Disaggregated data also helps inform decisions about how resources are disseminated and interventions are designed to promote academic excellence for ALL students.

Locally, New Orleans Public Schools have undergone a vast transformation that has led to higher graduation rates, higher college-going rates and improvements in standardized test performance for our children. Yet, the decentralization of our schools has had unintended consequences that jeopardize education equity and access for some schools and students. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans recommends the following:

- Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) must approve the Act 467 Committee's proposed equitable, differentiated funding formula to ensure that all students in New Orleans Public Schools have the resources needed to succeed.
- Return all NOPS to local control by 2018 through a staggered transition, considering factors like charter management organizations that have schools in OPSB and RSD, single site charters, alternative schools, and size and capacity of charter management organizations.



Urban League of
Greater New Orleans

The Urban League of Greater New Orleans (ULGNO) is one of 95 affiliates of the National Urban League. The mission of the Urban League is to assist African Americans and other communities seeking equity to secure economic self-reliance, parity and civil rights. The Urban League's three Centers of Excellence are focused in the areas of education and youth development, workforce and economic development and public policy and social justice advocacy.

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Urban League of Greater New Orleans 2016 Policy Priorities



Voting Rights

The protection of African Americans' voting rights is of paramount importance in securing our communities' full participation in the U.S. democracy, a cornerstone of citizenship in this country. Yet, many African Americans are still disenfranchised in this country through laws blocking people with felony convictions from voting. In Louisiana and 30 other states, felony disenfranchisement laws prevent those in prison, on parole or on probation from voting, effectively eliminating a significant portion of African Americans from accessing the vote. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans actively advocates for the protection of our voting rights and proposes the following:

- Support HB 598 that ends the practice of felony disenfranchisement by restoring voting rights to individuals with felony convictions on parole and probation, a practice that disproportionately impacts African American males in Louisiana.

Criminal Justice

New Orleans has undergone major reforms to its criminal justice system that have led to the reduction of the jail size, an overhaul of the Youth Study Center and a reduction in arrests for misdemeanors. Unfortunately, several core issues remain that disparately impact African Americans' interactions with the criminal justice system. For instance 80% of eligible 15 and 16-year olds are transferred from the juvenile justice system for prosecution in adult criminal court, the highest rate in the state. This practice almost exclusively impacts African American males. In order to improve public safety and to mitigate inequities experienced by African Americans in the criminal justice system, policy changes must be made to ensure that the City of New Orleans and State of Louisiana adopt practices that are empirically supported and that eliminate existing disparities impacted by inequitable practices. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans proposes the following:

- **Support SB 301**, also known as the *Juvenile Justice Accountability and Cost- Effectiveness Act of 2016*, which right-sizes the juvenile justice system by establishing appropriate monitoring, accountability and cost-effectiveness practices within the juvenile justice system.
- **Support SB 302** also known as the *Safe and Fair Return Act of 2016*, which protects indigent youth's right to counsel by providing the resources, funding and systems required to provide for a quality defense for youth defendants.
- **Support SB 324** which establishes the *Raise the Age Louisiana Act of 2016* and the Louisiana Juvenile Jurisdiction Planning and Implementation Council that will develop the plan to expand juvenile court jurisdiction to include children 17-years old.
- **Support SB 303**, which establishes and adopts clear quality standards for education of youth in custody and includes an accountability program to ensure youth are engaged in appropriate and high quality education experiences while in custody.
- **Increase state and local appropriations to the Orleans Public Defenders** to protect the right to counsel of indigent defendants.
- **Support a charter amendment** that provides for greater autonomy in leadership and funding for the Office of the Independent Police Monitor to help improve their ability to execute their role in supporting reforms within the New Orleans Police Department.
- **Support the New Orleans City Council Criminal Justice Committee's resolution** to examine trends in juvenile transfer to adult criminal court in Orleans Parish and that calls for a change to the adult transfer practice of District Attorney Leon Cannizarro by requiring the use of an intensive screening process before transferring youth to adult custody.

Economic and Workforce Development

In New Orleans, 47% of families are living in poverty or earn income less than the basic cost of living for the state \$18,859 per year for a single adult, considerably higher than the U.S. poverty level of \$12,331). And although 82% of families with children in New Orleans have at least one working parent in the household, 44% of children still live in poverty. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans believes that working families deserve access to economic opportunities that provide them with a better quality of life. As such, the Urban League proposes the following:

- Increase the minimum wage to a rate that allows families to afford the basic cost of living.
 - In 2016, the New Orleans living wage is \$11.08 for a single individual and \$21.94 for an adult with one child.

Louisiana has the unfortunate distinction as the state with the highest wage inequity in the country. Women in the state make 65% of men's median income, leaving many families in financial straits. In New Orleans, single mothers head 54% of households with children. The Urban League proposes that state legislators do the following:

- Establish equal pay protections to protect public, private and small business employees from pay discrimination in Louisiana.
- Increase fines for employees who violate equal pay protections.
- Increase accountability and transparency in state agencies by releasing employee compensation data including race and sex of employees for all levels of state government.

The participation of small businesses, especially disadvantaged business enterprises (DBE) can be a major driver of economic development and economic parity in the state. In order to promote small business and DBE participation in state projects, the Urban League of Greater New Orleans proposes the following:

- Louisiana Economic Development should establish policies to include diversity and inclusion metrics for all state contracts across all state agencies.
- Louisiana Economic Development should establish strong accountability measures to track and ensure compliance with DBE goals for all state contracts.
- Louisiana Economic Development should track and disseminate data to the public on economic inclusion including an analysis of its economic impact on communities across the state.

Education

Louisiana's children deserve a world-class education system that prepares them for success in a knowledge-based economy. Yet state officials have made drastic cuts to education that threaten the ability of schools and universities to deliver the necessary resources to serve students well. In the past seven years have been cut by 55% (the highest cuts in the nation) and pre-K-12 education has also experienced an 8.1% reduction in total state funding per student between 2008-2014. Cuts to Louisiana's education systems significantly disadvantage Louisiana's children and families, especially those with the greatest needs. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans proposes the following recommendations:

- Amend the state constitution to provide protections to the education and health care systems in the state to prevent against continued (devastating) cuts to these systems.