



Ensuring Opportunity Campaign Policy Framework

Adopted March 2016

The following Policy Framework is intended as a guidepost. The Framework identifies the range of policies that the Ensuring Opportunity Campaign may focus on within each of the Campaign's six focus areas to advance the goal of preventing, reducing and ultimately ending poverty in Contra Costa County.

In addition to recognizing the interrelatedness of the campaign's six focus areas, Ensuring Opportunity also recognizes that social, systemic, and institutional factors underlie and reinforce poverty in our communities.

The policies described below have been identified as **Top Priorities** that Ensuring Opportunity will seek opportunities support on all levels (inform, educate, and mobilize) and may consider leading. Items identified as **Secondary Priorities** are policies that Ensuring Opportunity may support by educating stakeholders and collaborating with our partners, but the Campaign is less likely to lead these efforts.

For the purposes of our campaign, the definition of policy includes formal legislation and law (local, regional, state and federal); administrative and regulatory action; and institutional or organizational procedures or protocols.

For additional information about the criteria and process for endorsing policies, see the Ensuring Opportunity Policy Endorsement Criteria.



Economic Security

Every county resident must be able to count on a level of financial stability that can sustain themselves and their family, including basic needs such as food, housing, transportation and health care. Raising the minimum wage and guaranteeing living wages in public jobs are important policy approaches. In addition, acquisition of assets (such as savings accounts, education and home ownership) allows for financial stability that transcends the amount of one's paycheck. Offering financial education and protecting people from predatory financial practices are other proven strategies to improve the economic security of community members.

Top Priorities

- **Fair Wages:** Support policies that ensure all workers are paid fairly for their work and are respected for their contributions.
 - Current Focus: EO will support efforts to achieve \$15 per hour minimum wage by 2020.
 - Replace the sudden loss of safety net benefits due to wage increases with rational policies that increase reimbursement rates and/or gradually ramp down benefits as a family's income or other resources increase. Examples include subsidized child care, Medi-Cal, CalFresh and CalWORKS.
- **Safety Net Services:** Strengthen and increase access to safety net services such as CalFresh, SSI, health care coverage, EITC and CalWORKS. Address concerns associated with the “benefits cliff,” in which residents no longer qualify for some public benefit programs once their income increases above a certain threshold, even though their earned income is still not enough to cover the cost of all necessities.
- **Revenue Reform:** Revise the tax system to ensure greater equity.
 - Fix tax-code loopholes and tax breaks that unfairly benefit high-income individuals and corporations.
 - Structure the tax system so that corporations are incentivized to operate domestically rather than offshore.
 - Promote and expand the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credit, child care tax credit, renter's credit and other credits that directly impact low-wage workers.
- **Job Creation:** Support the creation of living wage jobs. Promote regional economic development that provides living wage jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities for low-income residents and under-resourced communities.

Secondary Priorities

- **Ensure Worker and Community Protections and Benefits**
 - **Collective Bargaining:** Protect collective bargaining rights for employee unions to ensure that workers have a voice.
 - **Community Benefit Agreements:** Support project-specific agreements that ensure local development projects create opportunities for local workers and communities (living wage, local hiring, etc.).
 - **Regulate the Gig Economy:** Protect workers who are categorized as being independent contractors and may lack access to worker protections available to traditional employees.

- **Asset Building:** Support development of policies and programs that support individual financial stability, such as lending circles, Individual Development Account programs, Children’s Saving Accounts, and financial education.
 - **Consumer Protection:** Support policies that prevent and address financial abuse by institutions, such as high-interest loans, payday loans, high check cashing fees and other predatory practices. Protect public assistance recipients from excessive Electronic Benefit Transfer fees.
 - **Discriminatory Hiring Practices:** Reform hiring restrictions and impediments for people who emerge from the criminal justice system.
- **Key Sources:** Americans for Tax Fairness, California Budget and Policy Center, Public Policy Institute of California, PolicyLink, Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Third Way



Health Security

Economic insecurity is a large predictor of poor health outcomes. Access to health care that is high quality and affordable can mean the difference between extreme financial debt and poverty vs. physical and mental well-being. Development of policies and practices to improve existing health programs and systems that are available to all is a critical component of poverty reduction.

Top Priorities

- **Health Care Access and Affordability:** Ensure access to affordable, quality health care for all.
 - Expand the number of medical providers who accept Medi-Cal.
 - Support increases in Medi-Cal reimbursement rates.
 - Support continuation of the Affordable Care Act and its subsidy assistance.
 - Simplify health insurance access
- **Paid Family Leave and Paid Sick Days:** Ensure all workers have access to adequate paid leave to protect their own health, care for family members and ensure a healthier and more productive workforce.
 - Increase the number of paid sick leave days for workers.
 - Extend paid sick leave to home health care workers.

- Extend paid family leave so that workers can afford to take time off work to care for an ill family member or bond with a newborn baby or adopted/foster child.

Secondary Priorities

- **Mental Health:** Integrate mental health objectives into policy decisions, particularly to benefit residents living in high-poverty areas. Acknowledge the severe strain that trauma, social exclusion and other side effects of poverty can cause for community members.
 - Support increased investment in social, emotional, behavioral and mental health services and supports.
 - Support and fund early detection efforts for children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems.
 - Support policies that mitigate negative community impacts of trauma (e.g., PTSD and chronic, complex trauma).
- **Environmental Justice:** Low-income areas have historically been (and continue to be) targeted to host facilities that produce negative environmental and health impacts in local communities.
 - Incentivize local industry to engage in pollution prevention and reduction efforts.
 - Treat in an environmentally safe manner any pollution that cannot be prevented, reduced, or recycled.
 - Regulate industries that pollute and produce environmental waste.
- **Physical Activity & Nutrition:**
 - Create healthy, walkable neighborhoods where children can play safely and families can interact.
 - Support community gardens, farmersmarkets and other efforts to help residents grow and access local, healthy foods.
 - Reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and foods.
- **Key Sources:** Health Access California, Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity, California Health Advocates, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Third Way, California Center for Public Health Policy, Western Center on Law and Poverty



Housing Security

Residential instability is related to lower academic achievement, poor health outcomes and chronic stress. The Bay Area is facing a serious housing shortage and gentrification exacerbates existing inequalities. We support policies that prioritize development without displacement by addressing local housing shortages and ensuring housing stability for both renters and homeowners. We support “Housing First” policies that strive to end homelessness by providing access to housing and needed social supports.

Top Priorities

- **Affordable Housing:** Preserve and expand housing that is affordable for low-income residents.
 - Promote efforts to dedicate land permanently to affordable housing (low- and moderate-income).
 - Amend existing tax policy to strengthen housing supports.
 - Tax credits for landlords who rent to low income renters at a reduced rate
 - Improve the state renter’s tax credit by increasing the credit amount or making it refundable.
 - Create a permanent funding source to support the development of affordable housing.
 - Support enforcement of cities that don’t meet affordable housing requirements
 - Support Community Land Trusts.
- **Reduce Homelessness:** Foster stability in housing by investing in permanent and supportive housing efforts.
 - Support the Housing First approach, which prioritizes providing housing to homeless residents as quickly as possible and maintaining housing for those at risk of homelessness, and then addressing additional support-service needs.
 - Support rapid re-housing efforts (e.g., CalWORKS Housing) for those who are newly homeless.
 - Support increased funding for housing vouchers (e.g., Section 8, Housing Choice).
 - Support policy prohibiting discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders.
 - Repurpose buildings that can be used for supportive and transitional housing.

Secondary Priorities

- **Responsible Community Development:** Prevent displacement as development occurs.
 - Support project-specific Community Benefit Agreements that ensure that proposed projects commit to the creation of housing opportunities for low-income residents.
 - Support development plans and policies that invest in neighborhoods and stabilize existing communities.
 - Encourage high levels of community engagement, transparency and accountability in local land use and development planning processes.
- **Tenant Protections:** Promote and strengthen housing protections for renters.
 - Support responsible policies to protect tenants from landlord abuse and unreasonable rent increases. Protect against illegal evictions by establishing criteria (“just cause”) for lawful evictions.
- **Homeownership:** Create pathways to homeownership. Support low-income residents in becoming and remaining homeowners.
 - Promote shared-equity homeownership and other inclusionary housing models that preserve housing affordability.
 - Expand and sustain programs to prevent foreclosure, avoid blight and reduce mortgage default risk.
 - Supportive innovative strategies (e.g., Social Impact Bond program in Richmond, Individual Development Accounts) to increase local housing stock and create paths to affordable home ownership.
- **Innovative Living Arrangements:** Support affordable communal and private living arrangements.
 - Home Sharing: Support affordable living arrangements among two or more unrelated people, in which home providers are matched with home seekers who pay rent or exchange household duties for reduced rent.
 - Cohousing: Support living arrangements in which residents live in individual units but share some meals, activities, and decision-making duties.
 - Promote ordinances supporting landlords who rent secondary dwellings to low-income renters.
- **Key Sources:** National Coalition on Homelessness, National Housing Conference, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Housing Institute, Western Center on Law and Poverty, Public Policy Institute of California, Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities



Food Security

One in eight Contra Costa County residents doesn't have enough to eat on a reliable basis. Lack of access to affordable and healthy food greatly impacts a child's ability to learn and a parent's ability to parent and to perform well at work. Policies that reduce food insecurity, including wage increases and expanding the availability and affordability of nutritious food, will greatly help to reduce or prevent hunger.

Top Priorities

- **Affordable and Healthy Food:** Increase access to affordable, healthy and (ideally) locally-sourced food within local communities.
 - Support efforts to eliminate local food deserts:
 - Support incentive programs for grocery stores to relocate into underserved areas.
 - Support incentive programs for convenience stores to sell produce and other nutritious foods.
 - Transportation improvements that increase access and protect residents from predatory price increases by providing a greater array of food shopping choices.
 - Strengthen farm-to-school programs.
 - Strengthen and increase enrollment in existing nutrition programs.
 - Protect and improve government programs such as WIC and CalFresh. (Note: In Contra Costa, only 64% of eligible residents are enrolled in CalFresh.)
 - Encourage grocery store participation in CalFresh and WIC.
 - Extend CalFresh benefits to SSI (Supplemental Security Income) recipients or expand SSI benefit levels overall in order to help recipients purchase food.
 - Improve and streamline the CalFresh enrollment process.
 - Support the hiring of additional public benefits eligibility workers and improve working conditions for existing eligibility workers. Promote the “Double up Bucks” program that increases purchasing power and doubles the value of CalFresh benefits spent at participating farmersmarkets and

grocery stores and support residents to bring home more locally-grown fruits and vegetables.

Secondary Priorities

- **Increase Food Supply:** Reduce both food waste and hunger by promoting policies that incentivize food producers, retailers, and preparers to donate foods that are safe and healthy but otherwise wouldn't be eaten.
 - Provide or expand tax credits for transportation/refrigeration/labor costs.
 - Enhance and promote state/federal "Good Food Samaritan" laws.
 - **Promote Community Gardens and Cottage Food:** Support community food production.
 - Remove barriers to local food production and distribution, especially in urban environments. Reduce regulatory and administrative burdens associated with converting land to agricultural production, establishing cottage food operations, etc.
 - Reduce permitting fees and eliminate zoning requirements in areas where food may safely be grown.
 - **School Food Programs:** Increase access to healthy food for K-12 students:
 - Promote healthy food alternatives in school lunches.
 - Fund food programs during the summer and improve utilization during summer months (e.g., via transportation grants, summer EBT cards, reducing administrative burdens for sites).
 - Support innovative partnerships (e.g., with local libraries) to host food programs during the summer.
 - Expand school breakfast programs.
 - Ensure that children have sufficient time to eat a nutritious meal. (e.g., AB 1240 and AB 292)
- **Key Sources:** CA Association of Food Banks, Food Research and Action Center, Food Policy Action, CA Food Policy Advocates, Healthy Food Access, Western Center on Law and Poverty, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities



Education High-quality and accessible education is a key strategy for improving the lives of people living in poverty. An emphasis on education at all levels, from young children to adults, is critical to reducing inequality.

Top Priorities

- **Early Childhood Education:** Research shows that investments made in education in the early years can lead to profoundly better outcomes for children, families and the economy. Early interventions for disadvantaged children are more economically efficient and produce higher returns than remedial programs implemented at a later age. These savings come in the form of fewer students being held back or getting involved in crime, and more students graduating from high school and college and earning higher salaries over the course of their career.
 - Invest in and expand access to high-quality affordable early learning opportunities for children ages 0-5, particularly given that more than one-third of 3-4 year olds in Contra Costa County are not enrolled in preschool.
 - Fund licensed, subsidized preschools.
 - Support and fund early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers (including licensed centers and family child care).
 - Increase reimbursement rates for providers.
 - Increase the salaries of child care workers.
 - Strengthen early childhood education teacher preparation:
 - Increase funding for early childhood degree programs.
 - Reform the current funding structure that pays K-12 teachers significantly more than early childhood educators. (ECE teachers earn 60-70% of the average kindergarten teacher's salary.)
 - Encourage greater linkage between Associate, Bachelor's and Master's degree programs.
 - Develop systems and programs that empower parents and caregivers to advocate for their children, beginning in the early years.
- **Higher Education.** An educated workforce is associated with higher wages, greater productivity and a stronger economy. College-educated workers are generally paid more than workers with a high school diploma, even after taking into account work experience

and personal background. Research has shown that improving access to affordable higher education is a key strategy for improving the economic well-being of residents.

- Increase access to an affordable college education, particularly for traditionally underrepresented students.
 - Require community colleges and public universities to administer a priority enrollment system, with top consideration given to:
 - Under-represented students, including students of color, undocumented immigrants, and currently/formerly homeless youth.
 - In-state students.
- Recognize higher education as a pathway out of poverty and structure funding accordingly.
 - Fund programs designed to support students with economic and/or social disadvantages.
 - Prioritize need-based over merit-based financial aid.
 - Oppose faster-than-inflation increases in tuition. (Increases in public college tuition are strongly correlated with declines in the amount of state support of higher education.)
- **Vocational Programs:** Not every resident desires to attend college. Vocational education is a vital component of the school-to-work pipeline and ensures that local employers have access to workers with the appropriate skills. Participation in career technical education is associated with higher rates of employment during and after high school.
 - Integrate academics with career and technical education at the high school level.
 - Offer high school credit for paid jobs and unpaid internships. Allow for a performance rating system based on demonstration of career-related, transferable skills.
 - Fund and connect older residents to post-secondary skills training, apprenticeships, and adult education programs.
 - Provide on-the-job training to address workforce skills gaps.

Secondary Priorities

- **Positive School Climates:** Research demonstrates the impact of school climate on behavior and academic achievement, especially in high-poverty schools.
 - Utilize alternative methods for measuring school performance and student achievement. Reduce standardized test mandates and use a holistic set of metrics when monitoring success (e.g., student-teacher ratios, dropout rates, attendance, teacher turnover, school safety).

- Support policies and strategies that reduce chronic school absence.
- Support schools and districts in developing trauma-informed preventative efforts and crisis intervention strategies.
- **Equitable School Funding:** Utilize a school funding structure based on need rather than performance.
 - Provide more funding to high-need school districts.
 - Give local school districts more authority and flexibility in determining how to invest funds to meet local needs.
 - Prioritize parental involvement in allocating local education funds.
 - Implement more rigorous accountability mechanisms for school districts in setting expenditure priorities and achieving educational outcomes.
- **Key Sources:** First 5 California, Early Edge California, Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, California Budget and Policy Center, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Public Policy Institute of California, Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity, Third Way



Safety

Many types of violence increase the likelihood of poverty, including economic abuse, domestic abuse, lack of community safety, and an inequitable criminal justice system. Violence, like poverty, is not inevitable. We support policy solutions to ensure our communities are healthy and safe.

Top Priorities

- **Economic Safety:** Ensure strong protection and restitution policies for victims of domestic violence. Provide support to help survivors build economic independence.
 - Protect against interpersonal economic abuse (defined as making or attempting to make an individual financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money, and/or forbidding attendance at school or employment).
 - Seek debt forgiveness for victims of economic abuse. Identity theft impacts credit, which can then be a barrier to renting or buying a home, receiving loans, and otherwise attaining economic security.
- **Reform Criminal and Civil Justice System:** Mass incarceration contributes to poverty by creating employment barriers reducing earnings and decreasing economic security through criminal debt, fees and fines; making access to public benefits difficult or

impossible; and disrupting communities where formerly incarcerated people reside. Support methods to reduce the prison population. Address racial disparities in arrests and sentencing.

- Decriminalize and de-prioritize enforcement of non-violent offenses such as marijuana possession, loitering and disturbing the peace.
- Support policies that emphasize prevention and rehabilitation, such as reinvesting a percentage of savings resulting from criminal justice reforms into alternatives to incarceration including prevention (e.g., education), intervention (e.g., community service, restorative justice) and treatment (e.g., drug rehabilitation).
- Support policies that prohibit police from seizing the property of civilians (e.g., civil asset forfeiture of cash, cars, real estate, etc.) unless they are convicted of a crime and the state establishes by clear and convincing evidence that the property is subject to forfeiture.
- Ensure that fines associated with civil infractions do not further erode a resident's ability to get back on track and prevent or leave poverty.
 - Structure fines and fees based on ability to pay.
 - Adopt policies requiring local governments to allow judges discretion to waive fines and fees for low-income people or to initiate payment plans.

Secondary Priorities

- **Community Safety:** Exposure to community violence is heightened in areas of concentrated poverty. Prolonged exposure to high levels of violence can affect physical/mental health, reduce local employment opportunities and readiness, and otherwise impede progress toward obtaining and maintaining economic security.
 - Support best practices in community policing, civilian oversight, restorative justice and non-violent conflict resolution.
 - Support policies that reduce gun violence (e.g., background checks, gun dealer regulation, assault weapon bans).
 - Support policies that address institutional racism and ensure appropriate police training, conduct and accountability.
- **Domestic Violence:** Research shows how economic stress and hardship may elevate the risk for domestic violence. In turn, domestic violence may contribute to economic stress and hardship. The impact of domestic violence includes many “hidden” costs at the adult level, such as job turnover, financial loss, and loss of productivity. It also negatively impacts children and can result in increased school absenteeism and decreased school performance. Institutional costs are significant as well, including law enforcement, civil

and criminal justice, health care, mental health services, substance abuse treatment and social services.

- Fund domestic violence prevention and intervention efforts.
 - Support the release of additional funds from the Victims of Crime Act and the Violence Against Women Act.
 - Support funding to provide legal services, transitional housing and restitution to abuse survivors.
 - Enhance the safety and economic security of domestic abuse survivors by integrating financial strategies, tools and knowledge into programs and policies that support survivors of domestic abuse.
- **Key Sources:** Campaign Zero/Black Lives Matter, Drug Policy Alliance, Wider Opportunities for Women, California Budget and Policy Center, Public Policy Institute of California, Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity



Additional Cross-Issue Priorities

The following issues impact some or all of the policy areas described in this Policy Framework. We will seek opportunities to support effective policies within the following issue areas (as well as others that may emerge) on their own merits in relation to poverty reduction and prevention. We will also seek to identify linkages between these cross-issue priorities and our six established Campaign focus areas.

Cross-issue priorities include:

- **Transportation:** Access to reliable and efficient transportation is critical to attaining economic security.
- **Voter Registration and Civic Engagement:** People living in poverty face a multitude of barriers to voting and are less likely to vote than their higher-income counterparts. As a result, their voices and perspectives are underrepresented at policy-making tables.
- **Race and Ethnicity:** Disparities in economic outcomes correspond significantly and persistently to race and ethnicity. Poverty is racialized in our society as a result of a persistent and significant legacy of racially discriminatory policies.
- **Gender and Sexuality:** Women are more likely to experience poverty than men. Transgender residents are more likely to experience poverty than the general population. We are aware of the gendered disparities in all focus areas, as well as the implications for LGBTQ residents.
- **Immigration Status:** There is a higher incidence of poverty among immigrants compared with the general population. Undocumented immigrants are particularly vulnerable to inequities in health care and education.
- **Age:** An increasing number of seniors are living in poverty, and this trend is expected to intensify as our aging population grows. Poverty rates among children are also concerning, with nearly a quarter of children nationwide living in low-income families.