

## Iowa Community Action Network

### Legislative Agenda – 2024

#### GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION

- Given recent recommendations by the Boards & Commissions Review Committee, the Community Action Network would like to see
  - Maintaining the Community Action Agency Commission. We need and want Iowans to know what is happening with the work that we do and provide input - it is in fact central to the mission of Community Action and part of its founding principles. We believe that having this representation at the State level helps hold State Government **and** Community Action Agencies accountable and is a key component to the success of Community Action programming. Most importantly, the citizen voices of low-income families should retain their seat at the table in order to be part of decision making that affects them.
- Or**
  - A lived-experience representative or lived-experience advocate have a permanent seat on the Department of Health and Human Services Board which oversees a number of programs that impact individuals and families experiencing low-income. Having this perspective at the advisory table to the Department would be a much needed voice.

#### ***Family Development and Self-Sufficiency***

- The Community Action Network would like to continue to see the FaDSS Program reside within the purview of the Community Action Unit. 13 of the 15 FaDSS Programs reside within Community Action Agencies around the state.
- Keeping FaDSS with Community Action will ensure a focus on financial stability and economic well-being of the **entire** family. Barriers to increasing economic well-being are deep and wide. By keeping FaDSS with Community Action – these families will continue to have access to the wide array of supports offered by Community Action that may be otherwise missed by other Home Visitation programs.
  - During this time of workforce shortage, FaDSS helps families become stable and ready to succeed in the workplace. In FY23, FaDSS Families increased employment by 227% between program start and exit.
  - FaDSS is one of the nation’s premier family development programs. This evidence-based model provided comprehensive services through certified Family Development Specialists to 2,143 Iowa families in FY23. Families in FaDSS make substantial progress in a variety of self-sufficiency measures such as increased wages, education, job training, housing, and mental health counseling, and stay off other supports longer than non-FaDSS families.
  - In FY23, families in FaDSS earned total wages of \$9,942,658, resulting in savings to the Family Investment Program (FIP) of \$785,047. Families that were employed at exit had an average monthly family income of \$3201.16, an increase of \$1623.

## **FOOD INSECURITY**

- Revisit Iowa's participation in the Summer EBT program and/or get clarity from HHS on how the state will replace the Federal Government sponsored program (and how they will pay for it)
- Improve the Effectiveness of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Reduce barriers to apply and recertify for SNAP benefits, including repealing the asset test
  - Expand SNAP income eligibility to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)
  - Invest in the Double Up Food Bucks (DUFEB) program to incentivize the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants
  - Establish a \$50 minimum benefit for SNAP in Iowa
  - Invest in outreach strategies to increase SNAP enrollment and retention, especially among older adults, non-native English speakers, and other vulnerable populations
- Make it easier to donate food in Iowa by reviewing the Farm to Food Bank Donation Tax Credit and other laws that may create needless regulations in donating wholesome food
- Provide free breakfast and lunch to all students at schools participating in the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs in the state of Iowa
- Invest in the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement (LFS) program to incentivize local food purchases by schools

## **EVICTION EXPUNGEMENT**

- The Community Action Network supports legislation that allows for evictions to be expunged from an individual's record after a period of time (currently evictions are permanently on public record)
- On average, 40% of eviction proceedings rule in favor of the tenant. However, due to current laws, the eviction still appears in their public record. This makes it more difficult to find affordable and safe housing.
- 21,932 Iowans were evicted in 2023, surpassing the prior record breaking year in 2022 by 16%.
- *Proposed Language:*
  - *Court will expunge records no later than three days from the date of the hearing (or the date the hearing would have been held) if any of the following occur:*
    - *Defendant found not guilty, case is dismissed, plaintiff does not appear*
  - *Upon application of a defendant found guilty, court shall seal records after 7 years from the date found guilty (if not found guilty in an eviction hearing again since that time & has paid all related court costs/fees/fines/etc.)*

## **CHILD CARE & EARLY EDUCATION**

- Continue to allow child care providers to automatically qualify for Child Care Assistance
- Increase the CCA reimbursement rates to 75% of the most recent market rate survey. \*Use cost of care information rather than market rate to inform CCA reimbursement rates.
- Increase the number of absence days allowed for CCA \*consider paying for enrollment rather than attendance
- Establish a child care workforce state matching grants program to fund innovative strategies that support the recommendations in the 2023 Iowa Child Care Workforce study.

- Increase the CCA entrance income limit from 160% FPL to 185% FPL
- Implement tax initiatives and Strategies \* State income tax exemptions for child care providers. Address property tax valuation for child care centers to reduce overhead.
- Sustain funding for intervention and prevention services for 0-5 year olds
- Include Head Start and Early Head Start in discussions about statewide pre-school discussions to take advantage of federal dollars and braided funding to ensure better outcomes for children and families.
  - Ensure that existing collaborations and braided funding are not threatened
  - Monitoring – use HS/ESH monitoring standards.
  - Support of 0-3 Early Head Start by AEAs. How will this continue with the AEA reorganization?

## TAXES

- Pass no additional tax cuts that will make our tax system more unfair and force radical service cuts

**Use one-time dollars in the Taxpayer Relief Fund *not* for permanent tax cuts, but for sensible one-time tax initiatives that offer broad benefit to lowans:**

- **Pilot a state Child Tax Credit** — similar to the federal CTC that was temporarily expanded in 2021 and boosted opportunities for hardworking families, reduced child poverty and strengthened local economies. One-time dollars can help families pay for essentials like food, utilities and diapers as we study the credit’s long-term impacts on families and the economy.
- **Temporarily double the Earned Income Tax Credit** to from 15% to 30% of the federal EITC to support low-wage working families who can’t make ends meet on earnings alone. The well-documented benefits of the EITC include reducing poverty and improving health.

## IMMIGRATION SUPPORT

- More than two-thirds of the undocumented immigrants in the United States are in the nation’s workforce. These immigrants work in the toughest, hardest-to-fill jobs for the least amount of pay and the fewest workplace protections. Our broken immigration system leaves millions of immigrant workers without any way to become citizens, regardless of the taxes they pay and the contributions they make to the places where they work and the communities in which they live. ICAA supports a comprehensive fix to our nation's immigration laws that includes access to a clear and affordable path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living and working in the U.S. ICAA also supports permanent protections for undocumented youth and those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), many of whom have lived in the U.S. for decades and sometimes in the same household.