



2022

RMAPI POLICY AGENDA



RMAPI

ROCHESTER-MONROE
ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVE

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The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) has developed a list of policy priorities for 2022 with actions aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty. These policy priorities were developed by RMAPI's Policy Working Group after months of meetings with local experts, community and government leaders, representatives from non-profit agencies, and people directly impacted by poverty to determine which actions would be most effective and are most needed to address poverty.

We have focused on identifying overall policy priorities for RMAPI to support rather than specific legislation. Given the changing nature of policy and legislative decision-making over the course of a year, this approach will allow RMAPI to adjust to new developments in the policy space over the coming year and better respond to ongoing community feedback. RMAPI's Policy Working Group will identify specific policies and legislation and engage in advocacy that makes progress toward our overall priorities.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Raise Wages: to at least \$15/hour as an important first step towards more livable wages

Equitable and Inclusive Decisions: with regard to how COVID relief funding is spent and how government decisions are made

Invest in Families: to create economic security across generations and strengthen the systems that support them

Decriminalize Poverty: by changing the criminal justice system and focusing on reinvestment in communities

Within these four areas, RMAPI will support policies that:

- Have the support of community members with the lived/living experience of poverty
- Have the most potential to rectify racial inequities in wealth and income
- Increase self-sufficiency long-term, not just temporarily reduce poverty
- Reduce poverty inter-generationally, not just within a single-generation
- Identify the inequitable and oppressive systems underlying poverty in our community, and seek to disrupt those systems
- Are executed faithfully and with a clear path to sustainable funding
- Have momentum (and RMAPI's support can help push them forward) or need a champion (and RMAPI can help rally other supporters)

RAISE WAGES

Our state and local government have a critical role to play in supporting families and workers through policies and resources that provide higher wages, and incentivizing private sector employers to pay more. The first step is to establish an expectation of a \$15/hour minimum in our community, while acknowledging that \$15 is still not a living wage.

RMAPI is committed to identifying and advocating for a range of policy changes that holistically increase the income of people in poverty – including raising wages, keeping basic needs affordable, ensuring flexibility in benefit programs, and pushing for income and wage equity in our region.

Specific policies that support this priority area include:

- Increasing the state minimum wage to \$15/hour faster than currently scheduled, and indexing it to inflation to ensure consistent future increases.
- Increasing reimbursement rates and change state/federal contract rules for nonprofits, service providers, and health providers to provide funding for higher wages.
- Allowing for more flexibility in public benefits to ensure wage increases do not lead to an unintended benefits cliff

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

"While there are no shortage of companies that complain that they can't find enough workers, the reality is that the jobs that they are offering are not competitive in the labor market because of factors such as low wages, no benefits (contract), no stability (contract), and poor working conditions (call centers, retail, health aids, etc.)"

"The primary reason why so many cannot afford housing in our area is the lack of jobs that pay living wages, and the loss of jobs in the city. We do need to directly address housing, but we aren't paying nearly enough attention to the reasons why people cannot afford housing."

"I was struggling to pay bills before this. Now it's just worse."

EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE DECISIONS

Federal funding for recovery and rebuilding presents an unprecedented opportunity to ensure that our future policy and programmatic decisions provide opportunity for all members of our community, and decisions regarding that funding should prioritize transformative and long-term change. COVID has exacerbated existing disparities and inequities. If our region is to truly “recover,” we must address existing disparities along with the segregation, structural racism, and trauma that has created them.

Yet the importance of equitable and inclusive government decisions and processes goes beyond COVID – and should be the standard for all policies and processes moving forward.

Specific policies that support this priority area include:

- Creating paid and accessible training programs that are direct pathways to employment
- Cross-sector and local and state policy changes that address housing and school segregation, such as incentivizing changes to zoning and re-investing in communities with high need
- Transportation solutions, including ensuring the public transportation system is meeting the needs of low wage and disabled workers, and providing supports for personal vehicle maintenance

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

"All of these areas are interconnected. Those with precarious housing are likely to need help with child care and transportation and may be experiencing mental illness, for example. People who need help in one area are unlikely to succeed without help in other areas as well."

"We are resourceful people and can make due with what we have but we need relief & aid, care, considerations as much as those in better economic statuses, ethnicity origins & community"

INVEST IN FAMILIES

The child poverty rate in our community remains one of the highest in the country. To lift children out of poverty we must focus on policies that invest in and support the entire family, strengthening their economic security through not just higher wages but also necessary supports to income, increased accessibility and affordability of basic needs, and promoting long-term financial stability.

Families need flexible supports that meet them where they are and policies that make basic needs – housing, transportation, child care, food, and digital access – more accessible and affordable to those with the lowest incomes. Investing in families also means taking an intergenerational approach to addressing poverty, recognizing that poverty is often a cycle perpetuated by current policy that we must intentionally change.

Specific policies that support this area include:

- Creating a strengthened child care system that is affordable, high quality, and meets the needs of families.
- Tax credits that support working families.
- Basic income pilots and other efforts to get unrestricted funding to families

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

“Overall, addressing inequities in childcare, and being able to create sustainable subsidies for families for this, even if this means creating more after school programs it would be helpful to many families in the community.”

“First and foremost, supporting the young of our community by supporting their caregivers should be our top priority. Frederick Douglass said, ‘It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men.’ ”

“I believe people are the experts of what they need, and if there was a way to make more money unrestricted, it would better allow families to make choices as to what they needed that resource for.”

DECRIMINALIZE POVERTY

Poverty is not a crime. Too many criminal justice laws and policies perpetuate poverty and structural racism, especially policies that lead to over incarceration or excessive financial penalties – often creating a cycle of re-incarceration and poverty.

These laws and policies are rooted in structural racism, and we must be explicitly anti-racist in passing legislation and implementing policies. We must ensure that people in poverty do not face unnecessary barriers, punishments, or fines – and are able to access resources, support, and opportunity to find a pathway out of poverty for themselves and their families.

Specific policies that support this area include:

- Supporting the City, County, and State in revitalizing reentry services and changing policies in order to reduce the long-term impact of a criminal conviction on employment opportunities.
- Eliminating predatory fines and fees within the Court system.
- Reinvesting funds generated from the recent marijuana reform into communities to support the formerly incarcerated.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

“A complete overhaul is needed to review and revise laws that do not work because they were designed to attack the most vulnerable, poor, by in large uneducated people incapable of self defense, self medicating to cope and hopelessly ensnared, reduced to expendable commodities in privatized prison systems, placed out of sight in subhuman confinement.”

“The greater societal impact that [decriminalizing poverty] will have is large. Every member of society will see some positive effect from this”.