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In Southern Nevada, United Way plays an important role in bringing the community together around important issues that affect us all. Since 1957, United Way of Southern Nevada has directed millions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours into creating long-lasting community change, centered around these issues.

We are not alone in this regard. United Way organizations nationwide have a unique role in helping ensure quality of life for every person. In cities and rural areas alike, United Way organizations assess the needs of their communities and work on the ground to devise plans to fill them.

One key part of these plans is advocating for policies that advance the common good and championing legislation that improves the lives of many. United Way is a policy leader in the nonprofit community because of our focus on crafting practical, long-term solutions to human needs. We remain non-ideological and non-partisan, encouraging policymakers to find common ground in legislation that reflects and addresses the needs of the community.

At United Way of Southern Nevada, we advocate because we recognize it is our civic right and obligation to use our experience and knowledge for positive change. Through community assessments, close ties to community partners and direct connections to those we serve, we gather detailed knowledge about local needs and bring the community’s voice into the public policy arena to help inform policymakers in their decisions. We share these decisions in the community, creating bidirectional dialogue between the public and policymakers around policy issues.

Our focus on creating real solutions, sharing our community research and advocating to advance the common good shapes our policy views. To direct our efforts, we have developed a set of goals and values to help create real change. Our policy agenda reflects the work and strategic direction set forth by our Board of Directors and Public Policy Committee, focusing in the areas of education, income and health to strengthen and unite our community for the good of many.

As we enter our next legislative session, we hope you will join us in advocating for legislation that reflects the values we have established. Together, we can advocate to address the issues we face as a community and create a better life for all.

Sincerely,

Edward Garcia
Public Policy Committee Chair, Board Chair
United Way of Southern Nevada
United Way of Southern Nevada works closely with people all across Southern Nevada to unite the community and improve people’s lives. Together, we create positive change by solving complex community problems. We are one organization, collaborating with many, to create a better community for all.

Our focus on creating real solutions, sharing our community research and advocating to advance the common good shapes our policy views.

- Bob Morgan, UWSN President and CEO
TO create a better community, we need to challenge ourselves to move beyond addressing the symptoms and instead tackle the root causes of the issues facing our region. Developing a system of support from cradle to career builds strong and stable families, setting a precedent for positive change. We believe that by uniting as a community, we can create multi-generational transformative change for children and families in Southern Nevada.

Our journey begins with a quality early education. When young children are surrounded by caring, nurturing adults and enriching environments, their brain development is optimized, establishing a firm foundation with which to enter school ready to learn. Through various factors, however, many children are unable to access the early education that sets the basis for the rest of their school years. We must improve access to quality early education with literacy enrichment activities, healthy child development and social-emotional wellness. This begins with ensuring families, caregivers and other adults are equipped to foster the development and school readiness of young children.

When children start learning through a quality early education program, with families and systems supporting them, they are better prepared. We will work to increase the number of these children who graduate high school and help them become college and career ready through a collective impact model with our partners in higher education. We advocate to ensure they have the resources and services needed to be successful.
To help children succeed, they and their families may need the assistance of services like **health and income supports**, and our systems must work efficiently together to guarantee they can access them. Good health is fundamental to a child’s ability to succeed in school and an adult’s ability to provide for a family, contribute to society and live a full life. A comprehensive approach to health is needed to ensure the people we serve are healthy at every stage of life. Our health is greatly affected by where we live, learn, work and play, so we must advocate for **policies to improve conditions in neighborhoods** to support healthy lifestyles. Families also need to be able to access **consistent preventative care**, unburdened by cultural, financial, linguistic or logistical barriers.

**Income supports** are valuable resources that help improve stability for all families. There are over 80 federally-funded, need-based programs that provide cash benefits, food assistance, medical benefits, housing, education, childcare, job training, energy aid, and a variety of other services. These programs are designed to promote work by supplementing lower-wage earners’ income, making childcare and transportation affordable, as well as filling gaps for food, rent and utilities during challenging times.

Through programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA), we advocate for the **protection and full funding of these critical income supports** and promote policies that streamline access and enrollment. We work to remove limits that can block a family’s progress towards stability and a higher level of financial security, like asset limits and benefit cliffs, which are created when beneficiaries lose their benefits at a rate that is more rapid than their increase in earnings.

There are over 80 federally-funded, need-based programs that provide cash benefits, food assistance, medical benefits, housing, education, childcare, job training, energy aid, and a variety of other services.
The solution to these issues is a common discussion for communities across the United States. Regions face similar challenges as to which solutions can be created from local tailored investments. To best meet the community's needs and optimize on the strengths and opportunities already present, flexible federal funding can be a highly-valued support. We advocate for the availability of flexible funding to strengthen and sustain communities.

Four core sources of flexible federal funding include grants to help states designate dollars as they see fit to improve services in the community. States can receive flexible dollars to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in local communities through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) enables communities to designate grant funding for purposes such as the construction of affordable housing or neighborhood centers, or to create jobs through economic development projects. The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) gives states the flexibility to invest in services that help people, be it child care or community-based care for the elderly, and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) provides short-term food, utility and housing assistance.

With continuation and expansion of these funding streams, United Way of Southern Nevada and our community partners will have the opportunity to further increase our efforts to support children and families throughout Southern Nevada, creating a stable economic community where everyone has the education, health and financial stability to succeed.
2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 78th Session was a historic session because of its impact on Nevada education. The 2017 Legislative Session is again focusing on education, with issues ranging from early education to college completion. There will also be discussions on health and community strengthening agendas. Based on these issues, United Way of Southern Nevada gladly presents our community’s policy priorities for the 2017 Legislative Session, compiled with the help of a diverse and experienced group of stakeholders.

EDUCATION

Quality education from early childhood to high school sets the foundation for the rest of a student’s life. Nevada must provide the resources to empower children and teachers to be successful.

Provide additional funding for early childhood education for 3-5 year olds.
- Increase the amount for the childcare subsidy
- Support the match amount for the Nevada Ready State Pre-K Grant
  - Year 3 (2017) Federal amount = $12,849,229  State match = $6,918,816
- Provide adequate and equitable funding for K-12 by supporting the weighted funding formula.
- Provide funding for administrator and teacher training.
  - Implementation of AB 394 (reorganization of Clark County School District) required training for employees of the district to move to empowerment.
- Support and enhance the development of the Silver Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)*. The Office of Early Learning and Development (ELD) in the Nevada Department of Education was created through Executive Order #2013-16 and approved by the interim finance committee in June 2014. Nevada Silver State Stars QRIS creates a culture of continuous quality improvement for Nevada’s child care programs. This statewide rating system provides families with the information to make more informed decisions regarding the type of child care program they would like for their child.

*If a center is not enrolled in QRIS, they will not receive state subsidy starting 7/1/17
EDUCATION

• Provide initial teacher licensure reciprocity relief for educators relocating from other states and/or consider removal of other possible licensure barriers to increase teacher recruitment pipeline.

• Increase recruitment and retention of licensed and endorsed early childhood and k-12 teachers.
  - The state would subsidize teachers’ monthly wages to help lift the early learning professionals out of poverty and attract new talent to the career path. To help encourage educational attainment, the state could tier the wage subsidies based on level of education or professional development.

HEALTH

Enacting policies to improve the health of our communities is important help Nevada’s children and families lead healthy, successful lives.

• Enact nutrition standards in early education settings as a means to reduce childhood obesity rates.

• Expand access to quality mental health services for children and their families.
  - Discussion would be on regionalization of services and data sharing.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

We have a shared responsibility to create a stronger community by ensuring Nevada has a well-managed system of public services that protect and invest in our state’s most vital resource: our people.

• Support The Federal Competitiveness Project and recommendations of the Grants Council to provide a match funds pilot fund and purchase a state grants Management System.
  - Request state fund a Grants Management System to track grants statewide and effectiveness of dollars spent.
  - Match Fund pilot
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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