

# RAPPAHANNOCK UNITED WAY PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

**Advancing the Common Good:** Because local, state and federal governments are the major providers and funders of health and human services, Rappahannock United Way must actively engage in public policy discussions with them. RUW must develop relationships with them as we have with the private and nonprofit sector.

As a leading community impact organization, Rappahannock United Way (RUW) knows that real and sustained change in community conditions requires more than money. Rappahannock United Way is dedicated to supporting local community partners as they work to advance the common good. Strategies to achieve the goals specified below involve building relationships, educating, raising awareness and organizing grassroots efforts.

## EDUCATION

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### SCHOOL READINESS

**VISION:** Children enter school ready to learn and achieve.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports policies that ensure students begin school on track; hence children are developmentally ready in the areas of literacy, social skills, emotional ability, physical development and health.

**RATIONALE:** Positive early childhood development affects all of us. Over 85% of brain development occurs between birth and age 5. **On average 14% of children in our region are not ready to enter school; this is higher than the Virginia state average of 13%.** Currently 33% of children in our region fail in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade SOL Math. Early childhood development programs prepare children to become adults who are literate, employable and productive citizens. Because brain development occurs most rapidly during the first five years of life, children who enter school healthy and ready to learn are more likely to successfully graduate high school and less likely to live a life of poverty.

### HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

**VISION:** Individuals obtain a high school diploma or equivalent.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports policies on the local, state and national level that will help increase graduation rates and subsequent entry of individuals into post-secondary education or work training to become gainfully employed.

**RATIONALE:** Individuals who do not finish high school are more likely than people who finish high school to lack the basic skills required to function in an increasingly complicated job market and society. Currently **14% of students in our region do not graduate high school on time;** this is higher than the Virginia state average of 12%. Adults with limited education levels are more likely to be unemployed, on government assistance, or involved in crime.

## WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

**VISION:** Individuals are prepared and ready for the changing workforce.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports policies on the local, state and national level that ensure individuals are afforded opportunities for training and education that prepare them to participate fully in their communities, and support themselves and their family, now and through retirement.

Rappahannock United Way supports legislation reform, like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that will help job seekers and workers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and match employers with skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

**RATIONALE:** Currently **30% of individuals in our region** who live at or below the Federal Poverty Level **did not graduate from high school**. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in July 2013 the national unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma was 3.2 percentage points higher than those who had graduated from high school. The **unemployment rate for this region is 6%** in line with the Virginia state unemployment rate of 6%.

## INCOME

### FINANCIAL STABILITY

**VISION:** More households align spending and saving with income.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports legislation, policies and community practices that foster the development of a coordinated support system which will work to increase income, build savings and gain assets.

**RATIONALE:** More than **40% of wage earners in our region** are still living at or below the Federal Poverty Level. Currently **48% of households in our region** living below the Federal Poverty Level have children. More than **100,000 Virginians** take out payday loans every year. With payment interest rates averaging 280% in Virginia, 13% of borrowers failed to make payments resulting in over 8,000 vehicles being repossessed. RUW believes that individuals and families who have access to higher wages are more likely avoid risky behaviors and to own homes, build savings, weather personal financial crises and raise healthy families.

### EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)

**VISION:** More households align spending and saving with income.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports legislation which reduces the tax burden for low to moderate income individuals and families. RUW supports continued funding of the Earned Income Tax Credit by both federal and state government.

**RATIONALE:** Individuals and families who earn low to moderate income oftentimes do not make enough money to meet basic living expenses including the cost of food, housing, transportation, childcare and other necessities. By returning earned money to the individual or the family through a refundable income tax credit, the taxpayer is more likely to continue employment and work towards financial security. More than **\$17 million in Earned Income Tax Credits** (EITC) went to the low to moderate income working individuals in our region alone. Yet still more than 2,400 (30%) of eligible households do not claim it. EITC is considered the nation's most effective anti-poverty program for working families.

# HEALTH

## ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND PREVENTION RESOURCES

**VISION:** More individuals and families have access to physical, behavioral and mental health care and prevention resources.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports legislation, policies and funding that increases access to public health care insurance for vulnerable populations including children, the elderly, individuals with disabilities and low-income working families. RUW supports Medicaid reform and funding for other health services at pre-sequestration levels.

**RATIONALE:** RUW believes that good health helps children stay on track at school and adults be productive at work. Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP) are jointly funded and administered by state and federal government. Without these 'means-tested' health benefits thousands of Virginians would go without or postpone health care to the point of a health emergency which becomes an expense for our community as a whole. ***In our region 14% of individuals are completely without health insurance***, this is in line with the Virginia state average of uninsured. Virginia, as a state which opted not to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, will have a coverage gap of over 190,000 non-elderly adults ineligible for both Medicaid and subsidized health insurance through the marketplace.

# STRENGTHENING THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

## CHARITABLE GIVING & VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

**VISION:** Local nonprofits exhibit the highest standards of accountability, effectiveness, and community impact which will result in a better quality of life for our community.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW supports policies and initiatives that encourage philanthropy and volunteer engagement; ultimately strengthening the capacity of local nonprofit organizations to make lasting change and advance the common good.

**RATIONALE:** RUW raises more than \$3.5 million annually and is accountable to more than 10,000 donors and 1,000 volunteers; thus we have a responsibility to advocate for tax policies and government initiatives that reflect our region's values and philanthropic traditions.

## 2-1-1 VIRGINIA

**VISION:** Universal access to 2-1-1 Virginia so that everyone can connect to this vital information and referral service anytime and anywhere.

**ADVOCACY:** RUW's priority is to support continued national and state funding for the 2-1-1 system and the services it provides to Virginians in need. Specifically RUW supports promoting 2-1-1 as the hub for information for resource databases, directories, disaster information and special campaigns.

**RATIONALE:** 2-1-1 is the national abbreviated dialing code for 24/7 access to free and confidential community resource information and referral. Last year, the five regional 2-1-1 call centers throughout Virginia, recorded their highest volumes ever, with a significant increase in requests for housing and financial assistance. More than 419,000 contacts were made to 2-1-1 Virginia. Of those more than 5,600 came from residents of our region.