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## 2023 Legislative Framework

### Overview

The Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle (ULMS) and Tacoma Urban League (TUL) empower Black people through economic parity and strive towards social equity. Our staff work directly with Black and vulnerable people to provide wraparound resources within the context of our current political environment. The Advocacy and Community Engagement department strives to challenge systems and decision-makers to prioritize co-governance with Black and other underserved communities. During the legislative session, we prioritize the opportunity to empower the collective community to join us in this effort.

Washington's Black community has been promised a return to "normalcy" as attention shifts away from the pandemic and towards a currently troubled economy. Where systemic racial disparities in health exist, we reject the notion that our risks from COVID-19 pandemic are over. We reject that normalcy was ever to our benefit. We fight to be better than before. We must focus on access to affordable housing, reduced health disparities, economic relief, criminal justice reform and other basic needs because *that* leads to the safety and stability of our community.

### Outlook

Our collective power in the past few challenging years made powerful gains. There has been a 60% decline in police killings across the state since reform was enacted in 2021<sup>(1)</sup>. Our power passed the Working Families Tax Credit to put direct cash in the pockets of families who need them the most. With legal reform around cannabis possession, fewer Washingtonians must seek housing or work with a criminal record. Your vote and your voice made these wins possible.

But there is still work to do. There is no separating our identity from our economic and social conditions. Our community remains disproportionately targeted by unfair criminalization, excluded from generational wealth, and harmed by housing and work policies that aim to disadvantage those previously incarcerated. Our **2023 Legislative Framework** intends to ground the policies our staff and partners identified as necessary towards systemic change into five core beliefs.

### 2023 Policy Priorities

#### Grounding our Framework: Designing our Democracy to Work for Us

While the 2023 legislative session officially begins on January 9th, it *really* starts with our elections. Those who were able to participate in the election and who we elected determine



what bills will be up for debate and which bills pass or fail. It all goes back to whether we are empowered to elect decision makers who work for us. As you venture through this framework ask yourself, do you like the way you vote?

Numerous efforts to design our democracy will be moving through the legislature. With a jail system that targets Black and Brown communities, we hold County Election Officials accountable to [ensure voting rights and equal access to the ballot in jails](#). We are re-envisioning the role of money in elections, giving every Washington state resident four \$25 **Democracy Vouchers** that can go to candidates running for their state legislative district offices. We want to see radical improvements to our electoral system whether through [improved automatic voter registration](#), [investing in electronic ballot return](#), or implementing **ranked choice voting in our presidential primary**.

### **Safety Looks Like Having Our Needs Met!**

Everyone is talking about safety. Inflation and the economic ramifications of the pandemic have disproportionately destabilized our most vulnerable community members and anyone without the safety net of generational wealth. "[Poverty is more visible, and people are associating that with more crime](#)", inciting a reversion to police and punitive justice to address safety. However, we know that the safest communities are those where the basic needs of everyone are met and where everyone is treated with dignity.

We know the necessity for direct cash assistance is to ensure our community can put food on the table, pay for emergencies, and go to sleep with peace of mind. That's why we want the legislature to [expand the Working Families Tax Credit to low-income, working seniors and young adults](#) and invest in programs that work, like **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families**. Rather than directing funding to DSHS to **subject our community to hostile and intrusive investigations from the Office of Fraud and Accountability** we want to see funding go towards [establishing the Evergreen Basic Income Trust](#) to increase monthly assistance to eligible residents.

We need a \$75 million investments into the **Housing Trust Fund** to prioritize opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color by directing funding to the Black Home Initiative. We want to generate opportunities for Black Homeowners by reversing the legacies of redlining and segregation of Black communities to create more [Middle Housing](#) options; this must go hand in hand with requirements for cities to enact anti-displacement measures. Our legislature must mitigate the risk to renters in a tumultuous economy by **enforcing the obligations and protections for renters**, and pass legislation to **cap extreme, unfair, or abusive rent increases**.

We will resist any efforts to criminalize our unhoused neighbors or increase punitive and inhumane drug policies that perpetuate cycles of violence for our community members dealing



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with substance use addiction. Our lawmakers must listen to those with lived experience and experts from the Substance Use Recovery Services Advisory Committee (SURSAC) by adopting the recommendations to **decriminalize drug possession and increase investment in public health alternatives for people with substance use disorder.**

### **How We Address Harm Can Transform our Community**

Police and the criminal legal system continue to favor harsh punishment over creating opportunities for reentry, stability, and community-based restorative justice. Abolition is a practice, and there are steps we can take to better address harm in our community within the realities of our current system that work towards this ultimate vision.

Our communities have fought for our civil liberties and protection from punitive systems and as a result, successfully reduced the number of police killings across Washington State. We advocate for legislation to go further by **ending qualified immunity of law enforcement** and strengthening the [rights of victims of police misconduct](#). We can refocus police efforts away from pulling drivers over for low-risk violations such as expired car tabs with the **Traffic Safety for All** bill; this will remove fines, fees and punitive enforcement that prevent people from maintaining their vehicles.

Interaction with police and the criminal legal system reduces the ability of an individual to find stability and perpetuates poverty. **Reforming unpayable and burdensome Legal Fines and Obligations (LFO's)** removes a barrier to financial stability, especially for youth who often enter adulthood bearing an oversized debt. We also push to **reform sentencing laws for both juveniles and adults** to give those incarcerated more opportunities to seek an earlier release and reduce their time removed from their family and community. Taking the lead from survivors of solitary confinement, we must [end long-term use of solitary confinement and ensure those in solitary confinement receive medical care and humane treatment](#).

### **Our Environment is our Health**

We said it before, and we'll say it again: Your zip code is the greatest predictor of your life expectancy. Where we are and our environment is a key deciding factor of our social determinants of health – the context of our lives in which we live, learn, work, and play. Thus, disparities in our environment often mirror those in our health. With the pandemic, protecting our health became a top priority. At the same time, we began to closely examine how environmental justice is an intersectional issue, where social hierarchies—racism, capitalism, other –isms- drastically impact our health outcomes.

The recent Roe v. Wade case was an illustration of how sexism threatens the lives of women in our country and their trust in our healthcare system. Anti-abortion advocates have threatened



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to abuse health data to advance policies that harm pregnant individuals. This session, we are supporting a bill that advocates for **strengthening health data privacy**.

Economic disparities serve as another barrier to environmental justice. For example, while healthy full meals are essential to the development of our youth, they are not accessible to all students. Thus, we support legislation to ensure **free school lunch for all public-school students**.

And while climate change contributes to extreme weather patterns, access to electricity is an essential basic need to the survival of people across Washington. Therefore, we support **Energy for All**, a policy to ensure a universal right to energy access and affordability.

Affordable and reliable transportation is one of the biggest indicators for social mobility. It is essential that we prioritize state funding for the expansion of frequent and accessible public transit and **set targets to build back the public transportation network, while ensuring that vulnerable communities are prioritized in the process rather than displaced**.

While energy, food, and transportation justice are some hot topics, environmental injustice appears in many different forms—the devil is in the details. Did you know that a pair of jeans requires about 10 years' worth of drinking water? Studies have found that the fast fashion industry emits more carbon emissions than aviation and shipping combined. This year, we are supporting a bill to **address the extensive use of fast fashion** which would require fashion retail sellers and manufacturers to disclose environmental and social due diligence policies.

### Follow the Lead of our Youth

Youth voice is essential to the future leadership of our communities. Yet they are often excluded from decision making and policy conversations. We commit to following the lead of youth advocates in this legislative session and growing our network's support for the initiatives they put forward.

On November 14<sup>th</sup>, thousands of Seattle students held a demonstration in protest of gun violence after the fatal shooting of a student at Ingraham High School. We honor the lives of youth lost to gun violence and hear the cacophony of student voices calling for the adults and decisionmakers to act. We hear the call from youth loud and clear – we need gun reform now. We advocate to **ban the sale of military style assault rifles and support additional efforts to hold gun buy backs** to reduce the number of weapons in the community **and ensure access to [justice for those harmed by illegal firearms industry conduct](#)**.

Black and indigenous youth disproportionately experience homelessness, criminalization, and are overrepresented in the foster care system. We support the roster of legislation proposed by the Mockingbird Society, including legislation to expand **Extended Foster Care eligibility up to**



**age 26 and increase the monthly payments.** We must learn from their lived experience to pass legislation that protects self-determination and addresses the real needs of foster youth.