



2023

RMAPI



POLICY AGENDA

RMAPI POLICY AGENDA 2023

The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) has developed a list of policy priorities for 2023 with actions aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty and supporting upward economic mobility for individuals and families. These policy priorities were developed 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.

This policy agenda is focused on overall policy priority areas for RMAPI. As we continue to engage with partners and gather feedback from community members over the course of the year, 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 Income through higher wages and equitable job access

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

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

Reform housing by making housing more affordable and accessible through policy and practice changes at all levels of the housing system

Within these four areas, RMAPI will support public policy and funding changes that:

- have the support of community members with lived/living experience of poverty
- have the most potential to rectify racial inequities in wealth and income
- increase upward mobility long term, not just temporarily reduce poverty
- reduce poverty inter-generationally, not just within a single-generation
- disrupt inequitable and oppressive systems underlying poverty in our community
- present actionable opportunities for RMAPI to lead and/or support our partners
- are created equitably and inclusively

RAISE INCOME

Families and individuals need living wages. Beyond hourly pay, we must prioritize sustainable opportunities to earn higher incomes, afford the day-to-day cost of living, and build wealth. Our state and local government have a critical role to play through policies and resources that provide higher wages and incentivize employers (for-profit, public, and non-profit) to pay more and better support workers. As we have established an expectation of at least a \$15/hour minimum in our community, we know that this is still not enough; we must continue to work collaboratively and across sectors to advocate for increasingly higher wages, high-quality employment and workforce development opportunities, and other pathways to higher incomes.

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. We support policies and actions that address racial and gender wage disparities, and actively seek to reduce the racial wealth gap in our community.

In 2023, this priority area will include:

- 1. Local Wage Policies:** Advocating for the City of Rochester to raise its Living Wage Ordinance to a higher level, and for Monroe County to create a Living Wage Ordinance
- 2. State Wage Policies:** Increasing the state-mandated minimum wage for Rochester, indexing it to inflation moving forward, and ensuring that state reimbursement rates and cost of living adjustments for service providers support higher wages for the lowest paid in our state
- 3. Employer Policies:** Working to make employment opportunities more equitable, by changing employer practices to remove barriers to employment that disproportionately impact those living in poverty, such as drug testing, background checks, and credit checks.

In addition, RMAPI acknowledges the need to ensure that higher wages and public benefits can work together to help individuals and families reach economic stability and success.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

“Minimum wage needs to be adjusted according to inflation otherwise individuals at entry level have difficulty meeting a decent standard of living which may require working more than one job. Single parents may not have the luxury of working more than one job considering childcare needs and expense”

“I believe we should proactively educate businesses on why such policies are meant to help not only the workers, but the organization itself.”

INVEST IN FAMILIES

The child poverty rate in our community remains one of the highest in the country. Collectively, we need to prioritize lifting children out of poverty and reducing the toxic stress affecting the mental health of so many families emerging out of the pandemic. Families need flexible and culturally responsive supports that meet them where they are and policies that make basic needs – housing, transportation, child care, food, mental health, and digital access – more accessible and affordable to those with the lowest incomes. We must focus on policies that invest in and support the entire family, strengthening economic security through necessary supports to income and promoting long-term financial stability.

Investing in families also means taking an intergenerational approach to addressing poverty, trauma, and structural racism, recognizing that all three reinforce each other in a cycle perpetuated by current policy that we must intentionally change.

In 2023, this priority area will include:

- 1. Child Care:** Making child care subsidies more flexible for parents with varying work and education schedules, creating more nontraditional child care options, and strengthening the child care system to better support workers and meet the needs of families.
- 2. Tax Credits:** Advocating at the state and federal level for new and strengthened tax credits to lift the incomes of low-wage workers and families with children.
- 3. Mental Health:** Making the mental health system more inclusive, equitable, accessible, and affordable. This includes supporting broad prevention strategies, recognizing the connections between trauma and mental health, and supporting better access to more appropriate and effective crisis interventions for all families, expanding and increasing flexibility of Medicaid reimbursements for services, and strengthening the mental health workforce.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

“There are many working parents that work in nursing homes with evening and overnight shifts that don't have daycare and/or can't afford it. Put more money in childcare so that all parents can go to work and childcare never be a barrier.”

“The increase in child tax credits/payments during the pandemic showed how impactful these programs can be. Use that data to make the case for any comparable and feasible changes.”

“There needs to be more options than going to the hospital for those who are experiencing a mental health crisis. We need more respite beds. There need to be more options for youth who are experiencing a mental health crisis. There need to be more therapists of color who have the cultural competency to provide services for the long-term. There needs to be more intensive case management (as in, daily check ins) for those who are frequent users of the ER.”

DECRIMINALIZE POVERTY

Poverty is not a crime. Too many laws and policies perpetuate poverty and structural racism, leading to over incarceration and excessive financial penalties – often creating a cycle of re-incarceration and poverty in our communities. These laws and policies are rooted in structural racism, and we must be explicitly antiracist in passing legislation and implementing policies.

The criminal legal system has not made our communities safer. Instead, it has disproportionately concentrated safety issues into confined zip codes, targeting and harming Black people and communities of color as targets of both criminals and the legal system. We must shift our focus to investing in and building up communities. An important first step is removing unnecessary barriers, punishments, or fines to ensure people in poverty can access resources, support, and pathways to upward mobility for themselves and their families.

In 2023, this priority area will include:

- 1. Reducing Long-Term Impact of Incarceration:** Supporting record sealing and expungement and reduced sentences so that individuals who have been incarcerated can return to their communities and have access to education, employment, and other rehabilitative programs.
- 2. Focusing on Impacted Families:** Advocating for policy changes that protect families from harm resulting when a family member becomes involved in the criminal legal system.
- 3. Access to Identification:** Changing policies and protocols so that anyone who needs state identification can easily obtain it, as a key first step in finding employment, housing, or accessing public benefits.

In addition, RMAPI continues to learn more about and support efforts to create legislation to end pretextual stops and other policing practices that have disproportionately harmed Black and Brown communities.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

“I have paid a harsh price, with my own liberty, due to predatory fines and fees that do nothing to protect society. These fines are detrimental and even when paid have long term effects on establishing credit and working towards equity for myself and my family. Enough is enough.”

“These individuals should have access to drug/alcohol and mental health treatment along with housing vouchers and employment preparation”

“There are consistent barriers of employment for previously incarcerated individuals. With the recent release of many people serving long sentences, rates of recidivism reflected the need for these changes. We must all give people a fair chance upon release.”

REFORM HOUSING

Housing is a crucial basic need for families and individuals seeking to become stable and achieve upward mobility from poverty. Housing in Rochester is segregated and inequitably accessed; it is both a major cause of as well as a current reinforcement of continuing structural racism. Housing costs are a significant portion of families' expenses, and high costs and poor quality lead families to move frequently (by choice and through eviction). Inequitable housing opportunity contributes to the racial wealth gap and negatively impacts quality of life and neighborhoods.

System-wide solutions are needed, and policy changes at all levels of government can make housing more affordable, equitably accessed, and higher quality.

In 2023, this priority area will include:

- 1. Making Housing More Affordable:** Increasing access to housing and utility vouchers and subsidies, along with increasing the value of those supports so that individuals and families can afford quality housing that meets their needs.
- 2. Creating New Housing Options:** Support for new construction and rehabilitation of properties through local and state investments and initiatives.
- 3. Supporting a Variety of Models of Homeownership:** Strengthening local and statewide efforts such as Land Banks and the Housing Trust Fund that make homeownership more accessible to community members at a range of income levels. To truly support homeownership of all kinds, we also support financial services and supports that enable potential homeowners to achieve this goal.
- 4. Changing Landlord Behavior and Supporting Tenants:** Encouraging changes to code enforcement that require landlords to be accountable for improvements/repairs without increasing rents, identifying opportunities to incentivize positive actions and support responsible landlords, and providing tenants with the resources they need to be successful.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Decent affordable housing is essential and should be a right. Homeownership spurs the development of wealth in families of which the poor have been deprived."

"I think that people lack dignity when they live in decrepit apartments, houses; neighborhoods. I think these conditions foster multifaceted instability and crime."

"Affordable housing must be available outside the city as well as the city. They should break the traditional neighborhoods defined by 'red lining' and still mostly intact today."