

A Policy Agenda for Working Poor Families in Connecticut

Because low-wage workers perform a critical role in sustaining and improving the state's economy, Connecticut policymakers should:

- Expand economic development policies that address the loss of mid-level jobs and link the policies to workforce development efforts to improve Connecticut's competitiveness.
- Invest in education and training for low-wage workers so that they can move into higher-skill and higher-paying jobs.
- Strengthen work supports to ensure that low-wage workers can sustain their families and remain in the workforce.

Specifically, Connecticut should:

A. Strengthen economic development policies that retain, create, and attract family-supporting jobs with good benefits.

1. Increase the effectiveness of all components of the economic development system, including direct assistance to businesses, by implementing appropriate outcome measures and clear evaluation standards for job creation, wages, benefits, training, and compliance provisions.
2. Tie grants and loans to business to the creation of jobs that pay family wages and provide benefits, including health insurance.
3. Ensure full public disclosure of the state's economic development activities.

B. Strengthen workforce development policies and programs that prepare low-wage workers for available jobs and enable them to move into higher-skill jobs.

1. Remove the legislatively imposed spending cap for funding of adult education programs.
2. Expand English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.
3. Re-allocate federal welfare funds to education and training programs and ease restrictions on education for welfare recipients. The state should set a standard of self-sufficiency for TFA leavers and regularly measure its progress in achieving that standard.
4. Improve access to higher education for disadvantaged and part-time students and workers by restoring and increasing need-based financial aid for higher education. Allow need-based aid to students enrolled in non-credit, workforce development classes at community colleges.
5. Expand data collection for *all* adult education and community college students so that information on non-credit students is collected as it is for credit students. Use assessment results to improve outcomes related to completion rates, career advancement, and wage increases.
6. Expand the state's incumbent worker education efforts for low-skill, low-wage workers administered by the Connecticut Departments of Labor, Education, and Higher Education. Establish a central access point for employers and employees seeking information on program availability. Develop funding sources to offset employer costs and encourage participation.
7. Expand and restore successful workforce development programs, especially those that provide career assessment, case management, and retention support for low-wage workers, a policy that will also help employers in need of qualified workers.
8. Strengthen the links between business and secondary/postsecondary education, especially community colleges, to promote workforce education and training through such efforts as tax incentives for businesses.

C. Improve policies that assist low-income working families to remain in the workforce and to become self-sufficient.

1. Increase fairness in the state's tax structure and reward low-wage work by implementing a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and a child and dependent care tax credit, and promoting participation in the federal EITC.
2. Restore cuts in child care subsidies, extend eligibility, and simplify participation in the program.
3. The state should assist employers in offering health care insurance to their employees. Access to mental and behavioral health services should be available for low-income workers.
4. Increase participation in public benefits programs that help low-income working families meet their basic needs.
5. Appoint a legislative commission to investigate possible solutions to transportation problems faced by low-income residents, particularly those living in central cities. A timetable for solution development and implementation should be established with the commission's charge.