

Ensuring That Michigan Charter Schools are Accountable to Students and Families

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THESIS

To make charter schools more accountable to the communities they serve and to ensure that they fully invest in their students, charter schools should not be allowed to spend tax dollars on advertising.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Charter schools were initially conceived to be laboratories of alternative approaches in education, places to determine if traditional public schools should adopt new pedagogical practices. Although this idea of experimenting with public education had promise, it has been taken to an extreme in Michigan, which now has 308 charter schools.¹ Roughly 10 percent of Michigan students are enrolled in charter schools, and more than 50 percent of students in Detroit and Flint attend charters.²

With this growth, it has become more important to ensure that the charter model still works and that charter schools are held accountable to the students they serve. Charters get public funding but do not have to follow many of the regulations that traditional public schools do, which gives them freedom when it comes to matters such as structuring curriculum.³ It also gives them financial liberty. Charter schools often spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on advertising their school to potential students—money that could be better spent in the classroom or adequately paying their teachers. In fact, charter schools spent more than \$1.4 million of state money on advertising during the 2015–2016 school year. Some parents feel that the schools they entrust with their children’s education aren’t totally committed to their students, especially when they use government money to attract more students instead of investing in their current students’ education.⁴

TALKING POINTS

- Charter schools need to be more accountable to state government and to the families and communities they serve.
- Charter schools often spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on advertising their school—money that could be better spent in the classroom or adequately paying their teachers.
- A cap on advertising spending would encourage schools to spend on improving their classrooms rather than attracting more students.

KEY FACTS

- Charter schools spent more than \$1.4 million of state money on advertising during the 2015–2016 school year.
- There are more than 300 charter schools in Michigan that need to compete for the same students to get state money.
- Some charter schools spend more than \$400 per student per year out of the \$7,500 in per-student funding allocated by state government.⁸

THE POLICY IDEA

Banning charter schools from using state-appropriated funds on advertising after their first year of operation, and implementing a cap on the amount of state money a charter school may spend on advertising in its first year, would ensure that state funding would go toward education and not marketing. Schools that want to continue advertising could use donations or grants from outside sources to finance their efforts.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Charter schools receive state funding on a per-student basis. Schools often use too much of that money on marketing and advertising at the expense of investing directly in the students they already have. In fact, since charter schools get funding from the state government based on enrollment figures, they are structurally incentivized to commit more money to advertising. Often, this has led to huge ad buys by charter schools. When the *Detroit Free Press* ran a series on charter schools in 2014, it found that one for-profit charter school corporation spent more than \$375,000 of public money in one week on an ad campaign to promote its charters. Other charter corporations, such as Michigan Connections Academy and LifeTech Academy, spend more than \$400 per student per year. This is out of the \$7,500 in per-student funding that the state government gives charters.⁶ While funds are being used for advertising, students in charter schools face crowded classrooms, sudden teacher departures, and cuts to extracurricular programs.⁷

To hold charter schools more accountable, schools should be restricted from advertising with state money after the first year of operation. This policy would force charter schools to attract students through the merits of their curriculum, the abilities of their teachers, and their other academic qualities. State funds would be spent on factors that would directly benefit students instead of on ads.

NEXT STEPS

Charter schools are regulated by the Michigan Department of Education, which in turn is controlled by the Michigan Legislature. With the Democrats gaining seats in the legislature, and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer demonstrating a commitment to rein in charter schools, making connections with members of the Michigan House of Representatives and the governor and advocating for increased charter school accountability is the most direct way to change charter school policy. We hope to connect with the legislators who introduced the last major charter school reform bill in Michigan, the School FACT Act, including State Reps. Christine Greig, Tim Sneller, and Brian Elder and State Sen. Hoon-Yung Hopgood. We also plan to meet with other state representatives and senators to both build support for a bill on school advertising and learn how to enhance our policy.

However, it's also important to raise awareness with the public. At the University of Michigan, we plan to hold a panel to talk specifically about how charter schools can be more accountable to students and families and will connect with professors doing charter school research. To encourage a conversation and promote the work we have done, we will write op-eds in the campus newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*. Furthermore, we want to connect with charter schools themselves and talk to them about their experiences in order to get a firsthand perspective of what needs to be improved in the charter system.

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Reducing Cyberbullying by Amending the Guilford Public School District's Digital Literacy Curriculum

By Christian Pfeiffer and Pia Parisi-Marcoux

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THESIS

The Guilford, Connecticut, public school district should amend its curriculum for developing computer literacy in grades K–12 to include comprehensive instruction in digital ethics aimed at teaching students how to safely interact online and reduce cyberbullying.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Today, an estimated 95 percent of American teenagers use the internet.¹ This high level of digital activity has paralleled a surge in reports of online bullying: The number of individuals who reported bullying online doubled nationwide between 2007 and 2016.² In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System found that an estimated 14.9 percent of high school students were bullied online in the 12 months prior to the survey. Bullying has disastrous consequences: In 2015, nearly 1 in 10 teenagers nationwide attempted suicide.³ Victims of cyberbullying were approximately 1.9 times more likely than their non-bullied peers to have attempted suicide, and bullies were 1.5 times more likely to have attempted suicide.^{ibid.3}

Out of 40 states surveyed, Connecticut ranked in the top 10 in terms in incidence of cyberbullying and online harassment, with one in every six Connecticut students facing online bullying.⁴ In June 2018, the Connecticut General Assembly adopted a set of standards designed by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) to help students in grades K–12 develop computational skills and digital literacy.⁵ Though the ISTE Standards for Students represent a necessary framework for digital education, they fail to comprehensively address cyberbullying, particularly for the population most affected by it: teenagers.⁶ The ISTE standards are structured into specific guidelines for each age group. The term “cyberbullying” appears only once in the entire document in the *Impacts of Computing* subcategory for the age group 5–7 (grades K–2).⁷ There is no indication that cyberbullying will be addressed in higher grades.

Currently, the standards are non-binding and instead act as a template for schools to shape their curricula. The Guilford Public Schools district has adopted the ISTE Standards for Students and should be a leader in expanding them to more comprehensively respond to the need to teach ethical online engagement.

KEY FACTS

- In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System found that an estimated 14.9 percent of high school students were bullied online in the 12 months prior to the survey.^{ibid}
- Victims of cyberbullying were approximately 1.9 times more likely than their non-bullied peers to have attempted suicide, and bullies themselves were 1.5 times more likely to have attempted suicide.^{ibid}
- One in every 6 Connecticut students faces online bullying and accompanying psychological effects and stresses.^{ibid}
- A 2009 study found that school-based anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing bullying by 20–23 percent.^{ibid}

TALKING POINTS

- Youth involved in bullying, whether as victims or perpetrators, may experience depression, anxiety, interpersonal or sexual violence, substance abuse, poor social functioning, and poor school performance, including lower grade-point averages, standardized test scores, and attendance.^{ibid}
- The word “cyberbullying” only appears once in the ISTE standards, which may lead to oversight in the formulation of school policy aimed at cultivating digital responsible in students.^{ibid}
- The Guilford Public School District should update the ISTE standards to include students beyond age seven, thereby enabling teenagers—the group most affected by cyberbullying—ways to meaningfully address online harassment.^{ibid}

THE POLICY IDEA

Under the *Impacts of Computing* section of the ISTE Standards for Students, the Guilford Public Schools district should add language affirming the importance of education in digital ethics and cyberbullying in all age groups beyond age 7, with an emphasis on middle and high school students, whose internet use is nearly ubiquitous.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Amending the ISTE standards will affect a more appropriate range of students. Teenagers are the group most affected by cyberbullying, yet they currently go uncovered by the ISTE guidelines. And teenagers belonging to minority demographic groups are at a greater threat of experiencing bullying. For instance, LGBTQ+ youth are nearly twice as likely to be bullied than heterosexual students;⁸ female students are three times more likely than male counterparts to be bullied.⁹ and students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience more cyberbullying than students without ADHD.⁹ These groups are particularly vulnerable to the side effects of cyberbullying, such as anxiety, depression, and academic underperformance.

Because the ISTE standards have only recently been adopted, now is the optimal time to introduce language addressing cyberbullying for older students and reorient schools’ priorities around comprehensive digital literacy. In Guilford’s case, modifying the standards will have significant benefits for relatively low cost. The level of implementation—and therefore discretion over budgeting—is decided by schools. Because the ISTE standards are merely a state-sanctioned framework that schools can opt to appropriate, adopting new language has no financial implications. When individual schools adopt these standards into their curricula, budget projections are consistently low, normally only involving the cost of training educators and research dedicated to pedagogy. However, *not* modifying the standards will have a high cost for students: Relying on standards that lack adequate cyberbullying education will have disastrous effects on teenagers’ well-being.

The ubiquity of social media offers more platforms for bullying to occur, and students must be educated on handling tormentors. Fortunately, a 2009 study found that school-based anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing bullying by 20–23 percent.¹⁰ Amending the ISTE standards to include education on cyberbullying and online ethics may reduce suicides in disproportionately suicide-prone demographics. Without continued instruction in digital ethics in public schools, we can expect a rise in cyberbullying and a rise in the detrimental consequences for those involved.

NEXT STEPS

To garner support and convince the Guilford Public Schools district to incorporate provisions for comprehensive digital ethics into the ISTE standards, we will work to develop local support. Building a coalition with anti-cyberbullying organizations that have localized knowledge and topical experience, such as the Cybersmile Foundation and the Connecticut Regional Office of the Anti-Defamation League, is important for the successful implementation of this policy. We will also contact the Guilford Education Association, an area teachers union. The coalition will reach out to the Guilford Board of Education and the Guilford Board of Selectmen—the town’s administrative body—to bring this issue to their attention. Ultimately, the Guilford Public Schools district holds the authority to amend the ISTE standards to incorporate cyberbullying awareness and online ethics into the city’s public education system.

Raising awareness and garnering public support are equally important. The circulation of this policy initiative through social media presence and op-eds in local publications, such as the *Hartford Courant* and the *ShoreLine Times*, will inform and generate backing for this proposal from the community. It will also engage and mobilize key local stakeholders around the need for amending the standards in Guilford and Connecticut at large.

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Preventing Unnecessary Evictions by Reforming Indiana's Landlord-Tenant Law

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THESIS

To lower abnormally high eviction rates and thereby decrease economic and racial inequality, the Indiana General Assembly should reform the state's landlord-tenant laws to allow grace periods for lease violations and the withholding of rent when habitability problems arise.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Eviction, the legal process of forcing tenants out of their homes, is a profoundly destabilizing experience that creates vicious cycles of poverty and hardship. When families are forced out of their homes, they tend to move to lower-income neighborhoods¹ where they experience more financial strain.² Children in lower-income neighborhoods perform worse in school and earn less money in adulthood than their peers in higher-income neighborhoods.³ Children whose families move frequently between homes experience more emotional and behavioral problems and higher rates of depression, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy;⁴ they are also less likely to graduate from high school and tend to score lower on tests than their peers.⁵

Eviction disproportionately affects communities of color, especially Black communities,⁶ given the history of racial housing discrimination in Indiana and the rest of the United States.⁷ Many Indiana cities, such as South Bend, have shortages of safe, affordable housing, a situation that forces residents to rent substandard homes.⁸ Indiana's landlord-tenant law (IC 32-3-1-7 and IC 32-3-1-8) is extremely unfavorable to renters.⁹ As a result, landlords can easily exploit and evict vulnerable tenants living in poor conditions—especially in Indiana, which has an eviction rate 1.73 times higher than the national average. In Indiana cities with elevated poverty rates, eviction rates are even higher: 4.37 times the national average in South Bend, 4.93 times higher in Indianapolis, and 5.05 times higher in Fort Wayne.¹⁰

TALKING POINTS

- Without the right to withhold rent, Indiana tenants struggle to hold landlords accountable.²² And without a grace period to resolve lease violations, responsible tenants have no chance to resolve possibly minor violations.²³
- Indiana's landlord-tenant laws give tenants little recourse to protect themselves against eviction.¹³
- Eviction tends to force families into poorer neighborhoods, and thus, worsen their existing financial distress.¹²

KEY FACTS

- Eviction rates in Indiana cities with greater poverty rates are up to 5 times higher than the national average.¹¹
- Ohio's stronger renter-protection laws contribute to eviction rates lower than those of Indiana.²⁴ Cleveland's, for example, are 2.19 times the national average.²¹
- Eviction disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color.²⁵

THE POLICY IDEA

To lower its eviction rates, the State of Indiana should revise its landlord-tenant laws in two ways. First, before evicting tenants, landlords should be required to give them a grace period to resolve lease violations; second, tenants should be given the right to withhold rent when there are problems with the basic habitability of the home.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Although Indiana law currently requires that landlords maintain safe, clean, and habitable conditions for their tenants,¹⁴ it does not allow tenants to withhold rent as leverage when landlords neglect to maintain these conditions. Consequently, tenants often endure unsafe conditions¹⁵ and cannot use rent money to compensate for the additional costs they personally incur to remedy these conditions. If tenants miss rent payments, they risk eviction. The ability to withhold rent for essential repairs would empower and protect tenants.

Indiana, unlike most states, allows landlords to evict tenants with an Unconditional Quit Notice for lease violations, which means that tenants have no opportunity to address violations.¹⁶ Leases can be violated—and tenants subsequently evicted—for a variety of reasons. For example, police officers can issue nuisance property citations to tenants for domestic disturbance calls. Consequently, domestic violence victims can be deemed to have violated their leases when they, or their neighbors, call for help.¹⁷ A lease-violation grace period would give these tenants to rectify lease violations.

Ohio, a state with demographics similar to Indiana's,¹⁸ allows tenants to withhold rent for essential services and gives tenants three days to resolve lease violations.¹⁹ These renter protections prevent eviction. The poverty rate in Cleveland, Ohio, is almost twice as high as it is in Indianapolis; approximately the same amount of household income is spent on rent in both cities.²⁰ Indianapolis's eviction rate, however, is 4.93 times the national average, while Cleveland's is significantly lower, at 2.19 times the national average.²¹

This policy would not require infrastructural investment, and therefore it would be a relatively simple first step to addressing Indiana's high eviction rates. Given that eviction disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color, this policy would also mitigate economic and racial inequality on the state level.

NEXT STEPS

In the next few years, we plan on building a coalition of local residents and elected officials who would support the policy and demonstrate its pertinence. Continuing to work with South Bend's Near Northwest Neighborhood association to determine how to focus our advocacy and organization strategy will be important. The group is already working on affordable-housing issues on the city level and has introduced us to several local residents who are struggling with exploitative landlords. We plan to work with the Near Northwest Neighborhood association to arrange local organizing events in the next year. Other community leaders, including officials in city government and professors at Notre Dame's law school, will be key allies in the fight for this policy.

After developing grassroots support for this policy during the coming year, we will connect with the state-level lawmakers to lobby for legal reforms. Though reforms to Indiana's landlord-tenant laws must be passed by the Indiana General Assembly, the implementation of this policy is politically feasible—Indiana's affordable housing crisis has reached crisis levels and is drawing attention from Republican and Democratic officials alike.²⁶ State Sen. David Niezgodski and State Reps. B. Patrick Bauer and Ryan Dvorak of the South Bend area could be key allies in proposing and advocating for the legislation.

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Revitalizing New York's Southern Tier by Promoting Renewable Energy on Dairy Farms

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THESIS

To address growing economic instability among dairy farmers and to mitigate the impact of climate change, New York State should incentivize the diversification of farmer incomes in the Southern Tier through expanded production and use of renewable energy on agricultural lands.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

New York is the nation's third-largest producer of dairy products, with a \$14 billion dairy industry that dominates its agricultural and food-processing sector.^{1,2} However, reduced federal subsidies, shifting consumer preferences, and an oversupply of milk in both domestic and international markets have driven the market price of milk below \$20 per hundredweight of milk produced.³ Poor market conditions are exacerbated by the disastrous effects of climate change, with hotter and drier conditions already leading to a shortage of corn, which has driven up the cost of dairy feed.⁴ As the incidence of extreme heat events increases, dairy farmers will use more electricity to keep cows from overheating.⁵

These market changes have profoundly affected farmers, their families, and rural communities throughout the Southern Tier—the region west of the Catskill Mountains and bordering Pennsylvania. Small dairy farms are struggling to make ends meet: In 2017, the standard dairy farm in the state made an average profit of only \$47,804.^{6,7} And in a five-year span of time, between 2012 and 2017, 17 percent of New York's dairy farms ceased operating.⁸ Stagnant incomes have led to an exodus from the farming profession and an increase in suicide rates among dairy farmers.^{9,10}

Despite growing economic uncertainty, New York sales of milk produced out of state exceeded, for the first time ever in 2017, sales of milk produced in state, indicating a capacity to increase the state's milk output.¹¹ And in response to the threat of climate change, New York has been developing a burgeoning renewable-energy sector—one that includes investing in renewable energy on agricultural lands. Encouraging dairy farmers to install scalable, renewable-energy technologies on-site would help boost New York's competitiveness in dairy production, diversify farmers' income streams, and ultimately transition the Southern Tier toward a more prosperous, sustainable future.

TALKING POINTS

- Reduced federal subsidies, shifting consumer preferences, and decreasing milk prices have left small dairy farms in New York struggling to make ends meet.
- Investing in renewable-energy production on agricultural lands will help strengthen New York's burgeoning renewable-energy sector while diversifying farmer income streams.
- This policy will sustain New York's competitiveness in dairy production and further its role as a renewable-energy leader under Governor Cuomo's Green New Deal initiative.

KEY FACTS

- New York's agricultural and food-processing sectors are worth \$37 billion, with \$14 billion (38 percent) attributable to dairy production and processing.^{32,33,34}
- In 2017, the average northeastern dairy farm lost \$0.01 for every 100 pounds of milk produced, after all expenses were covered.³⁵
- If AD were used to collect gases from the manure produced by half of New York's milk cows, it would have the same climate change-mitigating effect as removing 225,000 cars' worth of emissions annually.³⁶

THE POLICY IDEA

The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) should encourage the production and use of renewable energy on dairy farms in the Southern Tier region. To aid small to midsize farms in the installation of solar and wind-energy technology, the state should create a new targeted funding stream or increase allocations to the NY Green Bank, the Solar for All program, or other related programs.^{12,13} The state should also explore the promulgation of innovative, scalable solutions, such as anaerobic digester (AD) technology, by funding research and exploring a state-administered cooperative model.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Expanded adoption of renewable energy will support environmental sustainability in the region while helping farmers maintain profitable operations. Complete electricity self-sufficiency would save the average dairy farm \$25,000 to \$31,000 annually.^{14,15} Generated electricity can also be net-metered to the grid, providing supplementary income that can help diversify dairy farm revenue streams and support farmers' livelihoods.¹⁶

New York's Southern Tier region has the most uniform wind-energy potential, and among the most consistent solar-energy potential, of any in the state.^{17,18} Installing renewable-energy technology would not disrupt agricultural production; leasing turbines to farmers and installing solar panels on farms are already common practices in the state.¹⁹ Land with wind turbines can still be used for grazing, and crops can be planted up to and around a turbine's base.²⁰

Meanwhile, the region lacks the concentration of AD technology—which captures methane from manure for electricity production—seen elsewhere in the state.²¹ Southern Tier farms could, therefore, act as prime test sites for new developments in the technology. If enough anaerobic digesters were in place to collect gases from the manure produced by even half of New York's milk cows, it would have the same climate change-mitigating effect as removing 225,000 cars' worth of emissions annually.²²

The strong renewable-energy-production presence in the state will be conducive to the rapid installation of such technology on Southern Tier dairy farms.²³ Annual job growth in New York's clean-energy sector is 3.4 percent, faster than the 1.9 percent average growth for all jobs in the state.²⁴ If implemented, this policy would bring New York State significantly closer to Governor Cuomo's target of 100 percent carbon-neutrality by 2040, affirming the state's commitment to a diverse, renewable-energy-fueled economy.²⁵ Successfully enabling the Southern Tier to become an experimental zone for this policy would improve the financial prospects of an industry that dominates New York's agricultural sector and stands as a pillar of a robust Upstate economy. The Southern Tier would also serve as a model for similar developments in other regions of the state, and New York would solidify its role as a leader in America's energy future.

NEXT STEPS

New York should adopt this policy in two phases. The first phase would promote renewable-energy generation on smaller farms to improve their competitiveness, and it would target those farms that are most vulnerable to harsh market conditions. The second phase would promote increased funding for research to improve the cost-effectiveness of AD technology. The state should also establish AD cooperatives, enabling smaller farms to prorate the costs and share the benefits of this emerging technology.²⁶

To craft and promote this policy, it will be necessary to contact dairy advocacy groups, including Cornell University's PRO-DAIRY Program, and NYSERDA, the agency best suited to enact this policy because it already promotes renewable energy on a regional basis. The PRO-DAIRY Program, which aims to promote New York State's competitiveness in the dairy economy, could provide key insights as to how best to ensure the financial well-being of dairy farmers.²⁷ We will also work with the Cornell Cooperative Extension, an agricultural resource and outreach organization, to arrange meetings with dairy farmers and food producers throughout the region.²⁸ It is imperative that we partner with these Cornell resources, in addition to agricultural advocacy groups such as the Northeast Dairy Producers Association and the New York Farm Bureau, to tailor this policy to meet the needs of New York's dairy farmers.^{29,30,31}

Once we have built a coalition of stakeholders, we will press state legislators throughout the Southern Tier, such as state Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton (D-NY) and state Senator Thomas O'Mara (R-NY), to integrate this policy's requisite appropriations into the state budget. We will present this policy to Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY) during the upcoming summer. His status as one of Congress's most outspoken advocates for both renewable-energy development and dairy farmers makes him a valuable ally and mentor. Tonko is also a former president of NYSERDA and will prove an indispensable point of contact to both promote this policy within that agency and navigate the existing programs that the state could expand to maximize this policy's efficacy. It is important to foster an alliance between these legislators and those representing renewable-energy manufacturing bases, such as state Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara (D-NY) and state Senator Jim Tedisco (R-NY), who represent Schenectady (home to a General Electric manufacturing plant) in the state Assembly and Senate, respectively.

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Using Public Reporting to Combat Discriminatory Jury Selection in Massachusetts

By Jeanne Bedard

Roosevelt @ Wheaton College

THESIS

Massachusetts should require District Court clerks to collect demographic information on jury venires in criminal cases and the circumstances of jurors' selection or removal, making an often-discriminatory process more transparent through publicly accessible jury-diversity data.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Juries are a rare instance of pure democracy in our legal system. However, attorneys on both sides of a case are allowed to remove potential jurors in the summoned group of citizens, the venire, without providing reason. The plaintiff's attorney often uses peremptory challenges to strike venire members whose demographics supposedly predict more-lenient decisions about the defendant. These strategic peremptory strikes can have detrimental consequences; they result in juries that are overwhelmingly, or fully, made up of white men.⁵ Demographically homogeneous juries are less likely to engage in rigorous debate, comprehensive deliberation, and detailed examination of evidence.⁶ A jury with no Black male jurors imposes a death sentence on the defendant 72 percent of the time, while a jury with even one Black male juror imposes a death sentence only 43 percent of the time.¹

A 1986 Supreme Court ruling in *Batson v. Kentucky* found that if the defense could show a racial pattern in peremptory strikes, the prosecutor must provide a race-neutral justification for each elimination.² However, the *Batson* ruling does nothing to prevent attorneys from employing simple tactics to strike non-white jurors:³ Instead of admitting to the race-based reason for eliminating a particular individual from the venire, attorneys contrive a racially neutral justification using any other personal information gathered.

Defendants are promised the right to an impartial and representative jury, but a truly transparent and democratic process for selecting juries is not yet a reality. Advocates lack access to comprehensive statistics regarding the disparities between the venire, the citizens removed by peremptory challenges, and the selected jury—essential data on jury composition that is needed to identify and rectify jury-selection discrimination. The only access that the public currently has to information regarding jury diversity is through research organized by legal institutions that often rely on interviewing venire members.

KEY FACTS

- In 2011, North Carolina prosecutors removed 20 percent of Black venire members, compared to 10 percent of white venire members.⁴
- Strategic peremptory challenges result in juries that are overwhelmingly, or fully, made up of white men.⁵
- Juries with no Black male jurors impose a death sentence 72 percent of the time, while juries with even one Black male juror impose a death sentence only 43 percent of the time.¹
- Demographically homogeneous juries are less likely to engage in rigorous debate, comprehensive deliberation, and detailed examination of evidence.⁶

TALKING POINTS

- After thirty-two years of continued jury discrimination, with *Batson v. Kentucky* in place as an insufficient solution, it is time that attorneys be held accountable for discriminating against potential jurors.
- The Constitution promises the right to an impartial and representative jury, yet a truly transparent and democratic process for selecting juries is not yet a reality.
- Publicly available information on jury diversity is essential to informing future political debate, courtroom policy, and the formation of more representative, less homogenous juries.

THE POLICY IDEA

Massachusetts should establish a statewide survey for collecting information on jury diversity. At the end of each individual's jury participation, the District Court clerk should distribute a survey to collect both the juror's demographic information and the outcome of his or her jury duty (i.e., removed for cause, removed using a peremptory challenge, or selected). The anonymized demographic information (surveys will not ask for or record juror names) will consider race, age, ethnicity, gender, education level, religion, sexual orientation, and income. The Clerk's Office of each District Court will synthesize the diversity statistics and publish them in an annual online report.

POLICY ANALYSIS

The annual report on jury diversity will segment survey data into four groups. One data group will show the demographics of all venire members; the other data groups will show the demographics of the venire members removed from the venire for cause, those removed using peremptory strikes, and those selected. The implementation costs for this policy would involve the cost of writing and distributing the demographic survey, informing District Court Clerk's Offices on how to compile the survey data, and producing and distributing the annual report.

With this information on jury diversity made public, citizens, researchers, and special-interest groups can track jury selection relative to a district's demographics and relative to other districts. When information reveals patterns of discrimination taking place in jury selection, attorneys can be held accountable for their discriminatory practices.

Some proposals advocate for ending peremptory strikes altogether to address discriminatory jury selection. However, when used correctly, peremptory strikes are essential for maintaining a jury whose members are not obtrusively biased, such as when potential jurors are personally involved in a case. When such a citizen vows that he or she can be fair, the only way that a prosecutor can remove this person from venire is through a peremptory strike. This policy proposal preserves the functionality of peremptory strikes while countering a way in which strikes can be exploited. A failure to combat discriminatory practices in jury selection will continue to affect marginalized citizens' lives negatively. Publicly available information on jury diversity is essential to informing future political debate, courtroom policy, and the formation of more representative, less homogenous juries.

NEXT STEPS

As record-keepers for each District Court, the Massachusetts District Court Clerk's Offices would be the institutions responsible for implementing this reform. A bill requiring jury-diversity reporting from District Courts could be introduced to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, a measure could be placed on a statewide ballot, or District Court Clerk's Offices could develop and publish a survey independently.

Groups whose support for a public report on jury diversity would be sought include public defenders, research centers, minority advocacy groups, the Jury Sunshine Project, the ACLU of Massachusetts—especially as the proposal pertains to its public-education campaign *What a Difference a DA Makes*—and other groups representing those who have been historically discriminated against in the courtroom, such as people of color, women, and the indigent. Through social media campaigns, messaging around this proposal will stress why public access to jury demographic information is beneficial. It will detail how citizens can be empowered to understand jury diversity in their own district and underline the importance of transparency in the criminal justice system.

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Funding Housing for Homeless Iowans by Allocating Airbnb Taxes

By Emily Miranda, Rebecca Lyons, Ganon Evans

Roosevelt @ University of Iowa

THESIS

To ensure funding for homelessness organizations and their construction of housing for the homeless, the Iowa Legislature should redirect funds from tax revenue on Airbnb rentals across the state.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

In 2017, 2,756 people were homeless in Iowa.^{1,2} Reliable housing has been cited as the most important factor in helping homeless people return to a normal life.^{1,2,3,4} But the line to occupy affordable homes is long, and the homeless are at the back of it. With low vacancy rates in Iowa, landlords vet new tenants primarily by using information technology, such as credit score checkers, that tend to exclude the homeless by default.^{1,5}

To provide the invaluable resource of housing and promote homelessness recovery, homelessness organizations have created their own housing market by constructing stand-alone facilities.^{1,4,6,7} Crissy Canganelli, executive director of Iowa City's Shelter House, says that the organization's "overarching philosophy is to get people housed and then connect them to the greater community."¹ This approach is called a housing-first policy—one that focuses on providing stabilizing housing before delivering or mandating sobriety, health, employment, or other services. The average per-person public cost to care for a chronically homeless individual is \$140,000.⁸ With a housing-first policy, this number drops to \$13,000–\$25,000 per year, allowing more than \$100,000 of tax money per individual to go to other state uses.^{8,9} Implementing a housing-first policy in Iowa would ultimately cost only 1/5 the amount that the state currently pays to help each homeless individual.^{1,5,6,8,9,10} And it would make a significant dent in the state's homelessness problem: In Utah, chronic homelessness decreased by nearly 91 percent following the adoption of a housing-first policy, with a significant reduction in costs per person.¹¹

However, creating or securing housing for the homeless has often been obstructed and underfunded. In 2010, Shelter House fought four of years of burdensome litigation connected to the legality of expanding their construction projects on public land that made its way to the Iowa Supreme Court merely to have the court uphold the legislation.⁸ Then, in 2018, Governor Kim Reynolds introduced tax cuts that reduced the Iowa Department of Human Services' budget by \$9.9 million, which threatened to slash Shelter House's operating budget by roughly 20 percent.^{8,12} It is clear that housing services for the homeless need reliable and dedicated financial sources.

KEY FACTS

- The average per-person public cost to care for a chronically homeless individual is \$140,000.⁸ With a housing-first policy, this number drops to \$13,000–\$25,000 per year, allowing more than \$100,000 of tax money per individual to go to other state uses.^{8,9}
- On average, individuals who have lived in stable housing for at least 24 months sought help from 1.75 more substance-abuse services providers, spent 55 percent less time on the streets, and reported greater abilities to meet their needs.^{6,10}
- Participants in housing-first programs reported a 67 percent decrease in suicidal thoughts, and suicide rates dropped by 55 percent.¹³
- After finding supportive housing, all individuals in Housing First experienced a 55 percent increase in employment compared to those without reliable housing.⁴

TALKING POINTS

- Reliable housing has been cited as the most important factor in helping homeless people return to a normal life.
- After tax cuts that reduced the Iowa Department of Human Services' budget by \$9.9 million, it is clear that dedicated financial sources are needed to provide housing for the homeless.
- Airbnb collected nearly \$900,000 in hotel/motel taxes for the state in one year, and this non-allocated money should be distributed to organizations that provide housing for the state's homeless population.

THE POLICY IDEA

In 2017, Airbnb and the state of Iowa agreed to a tax structure in which Airbnb collects hotel/motel tax that is broadly "distributed to the appropriate jurisdictions on a quarterly basis."¹⁴ To effectively deal with the homelessness crisis in Iowa, this money should be allocated to organizations that provide housing and quality care for homeless people.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Because of partisanship and a lack of clear policy initiatives specifically written for the homelessness crisis, financial support for homelessness mitigation has been a struggle to secure. Homeless shelters and organizations don't receive enough funding to run initiatives that adequately help this population. Under budget constraints, shelters are experiencing a slow and inefficient shift to housing-first policies.

In 2017, the hospitality-services company Airbnb created an agreement with the state of Iowa in which Airbnb would require hotel/motel taxes to be included in the prices of Airbnb rentals. In the first year of this plan, the state received \$900,000, and the number will only increase.¹⁵ The Airbnb business model is growing in Iowa; the company cited nearly 100,000 guest arrivals in 2018, a fivefold increase from just 20,000 guests in 2016, and Airbnb hosts earned \$9.3 million.^{16,17} Subsidizing a permanent fund for housing with hotel/motel tax money collected by Airbnb would mean that shelters could focus on properly allocating money rather than having to find sources of funding.¹ Investing the existing Airbnb tax revenues in homelessness relief would provide the financial assistance needed to expand housing-first programs, thus allowing the state to effectively aid the homeless across Iowa.

It's important to note that this policy does not advocate directly taxing Iowa citizens, so it would experience less of a backlash from constituents who disagree with their money aiding welfare programs. Legislating for a percentage of the revenue collected from taxes on Airbnb rentals would help guarantee that programs creating housing for the homeless are funded.

NEXT STEPS

We will be working closely with homelessness facilities and community programs, such as Iowa City Shelter House, which is currently collaborating with the Iowa City government to establish an insurance pool for renters,¹ to garner support for the proposal. Working with the Iowa Council on Homelessness would also be crucial in ensuring that this proposal comes to fruition. We will investigate the possibility of holding an information session or panel to share with the public the details of our proposal and gain the support of constituents and, consequently, government representatives. We will contact the mayor of Iowa City, Jim Throgmorton, to garner his support for our policy and discuss with him the logistics of lobbying for legislative action. Finally, we will contact members on relevant committees within the Iowa Legislature to gauge support for the proposal.

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Non-Binary Driver Licenses: Combatting Discrimination and Dysphoria

By **Caty Fortin**

Roosevelt @ Connecticut College

THESIS

To provide documentation that correctly identifies the gender of people who identify outside the gender binary and prevent discrimination against them, the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles should issue non-binary driver licenses.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

People whose gender identities do not correspond with the sex that they were assigned at birth face perpetual and systematic oppression. They are often misunderstood and discriminated against, and they even face violence because of their identities. In surveys sent to transgender and non-binary people, 52 percent reported bullying in school, 60 percent reported a healthcare provider refusing to treat them, and 58 percent reported harassment by law enforcement officials.¹

These iniquities are compounded when transgender and non-binary people have government documentation, such as state ID cards or driver licenses, that lists names and genders that do not match their gender identity and expression. Having identification that properly reflects their gender could decrease suicidal ideation in 90 out of 1,000 transgender or non-binary people.²

The process of changing one's driver license to non-binary is available in Maine, Oregon, California, and Washington, DC.³ Each state has its own procedures, such as applying stickers on licenses, providing online applications, or offering the opportunity to appeal the courts. The common theme they all share is making their current state system easy to navigate and straightforward.

In Connecticut, the current process for people who are transgender to alter their driver license is neither. People must first see a medical professional, who diagnoses them with gender dysphoria. Next, they have to legally change their name, which requires going to court and waiting for a court date. People can wait months before their name is legally changed. Then, they must fill out a form and go to their local Department of Motor Vehicles site to officially change the driver license to reflect the new information. The medical visit, name change, and the license change all require wait times and fees, which could require people to take time off from work and pay extra money to simply be identified as who they are. The process is discriminatory and inordinately challenging for people at a lower socioeconomic status.

KEY FACTS

- Suicide attempt rates for out non-binary and transgender people is 50 percent, compared to the national average of 4.6 percent.¹¹
- Having identification that properly reflects gender could decrease suicidal ideation in 90 out of 1,000 transgender or non-binary people.¹²

TALKING POINTS

- Allowing for a non-binary option on driver licenses can help transgender and non-binary people avoid discrimination in schools, offices of medical professionals, and workplaces.⁴
- In Connecticut, people who wish to change their sex on their driver license to align with their gender must undergo an onerous three-step process and wait for months.
- Establishing a non-binary option on driver licenses helps transgender and non-binary individuals avoid a discriminatory, costly, and challenging process.

THE POLICY IDEA

Connecticut should establish a non-binary option on driver licenses, either through an empty space next to the sex category or an “X” in the place of an “F” or “M.”⁵

Having this legal recognition and identification of their gender identities can help transgender and non-binary people avoid discrimination in schools, offices of medical professionals, and workplaces.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Although Connecticut’s policies regarding driver license sex information are more accessible than those of other states, they are still discriminatory, difficult to comply with, and expensive for most constituents. Beyond missing work and paying fees for legal proceedings, obtaining a doctor’s diagnosis can be hard for those who lack health insurance or access to a mental health care provider. In addition, medical offices often are places of misunderstanding and discrimination for non-binary people. Because they frequently experience discrimination from medical professionals, 23 percent of non-binary people report avoiding medical care.⁷ Unsurprisingly, many also avoid going to medical offices to garner the diagnosis and documentation necessary to change their gender.

The biggest hurdle in enacting this policy is that might slightly increase wait times at the Department of Motor Vehicles. However, there is no clear data on the exact number of transgender and non-binary people in Connecticut; more likely than not, the number is small and would not overwhelm the Department of Motor Vehicles.

NEXT STEPS

A coalition will be necessary to implement a policy requiring a non-binary option on Connecticut driver licenses. Campus outreach will focus on enlisting professors and students of the Gender, Intersectionality, and Women’s Studies Program at Connecticut College for their insights, knowledge, resources, and support. Our coalition will involve LGBTQIA+ people, specifically non-binary or genderqueer people, and a variety of local and regional groups that advocate for LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities, including Triangle Community Center, Connecticut Trans-Advocacy Coalition, True Colors, In Our Own Voices, and the Audre Lorde Project.⁸

The biggest obstacle to enacting this policy will be convincing legislators that the issue matters enough to create and debate a bill over it. Therefore, we plan to use social media to educate and mobilize citizens in Connecticut about the need for this policy change. A lobby day and meetings with state representatives and senators, including leaders from both the Republican party and Democratic Party, could gain the necessary support to propose and pass a bill allowing a non-binary option on driver licenses. In the state of Connecticut, there are only two openly LGBTQIA+ legislators: Jeffrey Currey and Raghiv Allie-Brennan.⁹ However, just because they identify as LGBTQIA+ does not mean that they will support this idea. Meanwhile, six openly LGBTQIA+ Republican candidates ran for office in 2018, which indicates a promising change in Republican presentations of self in the state.¹⁰ Therefore, support for this policy could supersede party lines.

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Limiting “Pay-to-Stay” Housing Fees for Prisoners Without Work Opportunities

By Jamie Thomas and Matthew Hayes

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THESIS

To reduce debt caused by fees that prisoners cannot pay, and thus reduce recidivism rates, the Commonwealth of Virginia should not charge housing fees to prisoners who are not on work release.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

In 1985, the Macomb County Jail, in Mount Clemens, Michigan, instituted the first corrections fee, through which the sheriff and county Board of Commissioners began collecting up to \$60 a day from inmates to offset rising operating costs. Today, many corrections facilities across the country—including those in the Commonwealth of Virginia—bill prisoners for operating costs. These so-called “pay-to-stay” fees include charges for room and board, work release, physicals, dental visits, medication, prescriptions, nurse sick calls, and hospital medical treatment.¹ As a result of their interaction with the criminal justice system, 10 million individuals nationwide have incurred more than 50 billion dollars in debt. This debt has greatly reduced the success rate of reintegration, which was the original goal of the penitentiary system. In fact, the debt that inmates incur from pay-to-stay fees has been shown to increase recidivism rates.² The issue inordinately affects people of color. In Virginia, Black Americans comprise roughly 20 percent of the adult population, yet they make up more than 60 percent of the inmate population at state-run facilities.³ Virginia has an obligation to stop charging housing fees to those who are incarcerated and are, therefore, unable to pay such fees.

KEY FACTS

- Nationwide, 10 million individuals have incurred more than 50 billion dollars in debt because of their interaction with the criminal justice system; pay-to-stay fees contribute to this debt.⁸
- An estimated 80 percent of inmates in jail are indigent, making it nearly impossible for them to afford the \$3 per day charge for room and board without new income.⁹
- Criminal justice fees, such as pay-to-stay fees, cause cycles of poverty and increase the chances that those who contact the criminal justice system will contact it again.¹⁰

TALKING POINTS

- Prohibiting an inmate from earning money, while forcing said inmate to pay for room and board, increases the probability that the inmate will enter into a state of indebtedness, which in turn decreases the chance that he or she will successfully reenter society.
- The debt that inmates incur from pay-to-stay fees increases recidivism rates.⁴
- Reducing room-and-board fees and the resulting debt incurred by prisoners will encourage a higher reentry success rate, reduce incidence of recidivism, and ultimately cost taxpayers less.

THE POLICY IDEA

Virginia should limit sheriffs' abilities to collect room-and-board fees in its jails to prisoners who are on work release and lower the maximum fee that sheriffs are allowed to impose from \$3 a day, as permitted in state code §53.1-131.3, to \$1 a day. This policy change will help reduce debt being incurred by indigent prisoners, which will in turn encourage a higher reentry success rate. Furthermore, prisoners who are not able to work should not be charged housing fees.

POLICY ANALYSIS

An estimated 80 percent of inmates in jail are indigent, making it nearly impossible for them to afford the \$3 per day charge for room and board.⁵ Restricting payment of room and board in jails to inmates who are on work release and capping the maximum room and board payment to \$1 per day will reduce both the debt incurred by inmates being housed in Virginia jails and the total expenditures of Virginia's jails.

Inmates are not the only ones who would benefit from this proposed policy. Virginia's jails spent \$995.6 million to house inmates for a total of 10.3 million days in FY 2016 (or approximately \$85.17 per inmate per day).⁶ That means that taxpayers spent at least \$82.17 to house a single prisoner for a single day, which is more than 27 times what any inmate paid for his or her own room and board. Since pay-to-stay fees can actually *cause* inmates to reoffend if said fees force inmates into debt, preventing indebtedness by limiting how much inmates are charged for room and board will help prevent recidivism, thereby ultimately benefitting taxpayers.⁷ The potential cost of housing indebted reoffenders negates the benefits Virginia taxpayers gain by imposing current fees.

NEXT STEPS

We will reach out to those whom are focused on criminal justice reform, prison systems, and legal aid. Key stakeholders include the Virginia General Assembly, prisoners, educators, labor unions, prison staff, the Virginia Department of Corrections, reentry programs, law enforcement officials, and mental health specialists. In particular, we will schedule meetings with local Fairfax County prisons and prison workers. Communication and messaging will be done through a comprehensive list of media outlets and social media platforms. We plan to share this policy with local representatives within the Virginia House of Delegates for potential bill submission for 2019.

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Freedom of Information: Expanding Democratic Access and Government Accountability in Michigan through Transparency Laws

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THESIS

Michigan should remedy its noncompliance with freedom of information laws, especially by eliminating FOIA exemptions for the offices of the governor, lieutenant governor, and state legislators, to enhance government transparency and accountability for the actions of elected officials.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was created to ensure an open government. An open government creates trust between itself and its citizens and, according to the US Department of Justice's 2009 FOIA guidelines, needs participation, transparency, and collaboration.¹ In 2015, the Center for Public Integrity conducted a comprehensive assessment of state government accountability and transparency. Its State Integrity Investigation found that, compared to all other states, Michigan ranked last in terms of protective, anti-corruption laws and transparency.² In part, this is because the offices of the governor, lieutenant governor, and legislators are FOIA-exempt under current legislation. This means that citizens do not have the right to request and obtain records from any of these elected officials.

Since the completion of the State Integrity Investigation, the Michigan House of Representatives has attempted to improve government transparency. In 2017, House legislators introduced a series of consecutive bills, H.B. 4148–4157, to strengthen and expand Michigan's FOIA laws.³ These bills were passed in the House unanimously. However, these bills never made it to the Senate floor.

It required immense public pressure to get the former governor, Rick Snyder, to voluntarily release heavily redacted documents related to the Flint water crisis, one of the most salient failures of government in Michigan's history.⁵ Creating a legal framework to force the governor and legislature to release documents will enable Michiganders to know more about the actions of elected officials and bring Michigan in line with national standards of transparency and open government.

KEY FACTS

- Michigan ranks dead last of the 50 states in terms of legislation that ensures government transparency and accountability.²
- The offices of the governor, lieutenant governor, and legislators are FOIA-exempt under current legislation. This means that citizens do not have the right to request and obtain records from any of these elected officials.³
- Research has shown that open government and record-sharing practices foster a sense of trust between citizens and their government.⁴
- The Michigan House of Representatives passed 10 related bills intending to implement transparency regulations, but these all failed to pass in the Senate.³

TALKING POINTS

- Michigan's FOIA exemptions are a barrier to democratic access and should be eliminated.
- The benefits of greater transparency far outweigh the costs associated with expanding the scope of FOIA laws.
- Eliminating the exemptions would align Michigan with the majority of other states and federal FOIA regulations.

THE POLICY IDEA

The Michigan legislature should pass legislation that enforces compliance with federal FOIA regulations. This legislation would make government agencies more accountable for fulfilling FOIA requests and limiting needless exemptions. The new legislation would mandate stricter, definite deadlines for the state to honor FOIA requests. In addition, the law would obligate the offices of the governor, lieutenant governor, and the state legislators to have open-records policies in regards to FOIA requests.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Enforcing expanded compliance with FOIA requests would incentivize elected officials to act in the best interests of their constituents, and it would enable voters to make more informed decisions in elections. Ultimately, the policy would expand democratic access for the voters of Michigan.

The law would encompass a greater number of officials and a higher volume of information would fall under the law's jurisdiction. The total amount spent by Michigan to process FOIA requests will therefore increase, but under existing FOIA laws, much of the cost of FOIA requests is borne by the individual or entity filing the request. New government infrastructure would not be required because most governmental entities have been processing FOIA requests for decades, including much of the executive branch and agencies of the state legislature.⁶ However, additional resources would be needed to hire FOIA coordinators, who process FOIA requests, for the legislative chambers and the offices of the governor and lieutenant governor.⁷ Resources would need to be budgeted according to the expected volume of requests for each office. The state has no practical argument against these expenses; the benefits of greater democratic access and the increased visibility into how taxpayer dollars are managed are worth these additional costs.

NEXT STEPS

To expand Michigan's FOIA laws, we need to reach out to legislators who support increased government transparency. Representative Yousef Rabhi of Ann Arbor has expressed support for such measures. He has also worked quite extensively with his student constituents and will most likely be our closest ally in the advocacy process. We will also need support from legislators on the House and Senate Government Operations Committees for the measure to be passed legislatively. Current Governor Gretchen Whitmer has issued executive orders to increase transparency measures within her own office and could be a powerful ally in the process to lastingly expand democratic access as encoded in Michigan's laws. Language must be drafted that would address the current exemptions without creating unwanted loopholes. Once written, the draft bill must be petitioned to the legislature or introduced by a sitting representative or senator.⁸ From there, it would need to be approved by both chambers of the legislature and the governor.

However, because this measure would directly circumscribe liberties presently enjoyed by legislative and executive officials, securing those officials' support may be difficult. It may therefore be necessary for the policy to be implemented via ballot initiative, which would require support from a majority of the electorate. If the measure is petitioned and the state legislature does not approve it, it will be placed on the next general election ballot to be considered by the electorate. This process will require support from advocacy groups, elected officials, and the public. There are many statewide groups that advocate for increased democratic access, such as the League of Women Voters of Michigan. We hope to find support from local media during the advocacy process, because the media are large proponents of government transparency and frequent submitters of FOIA requests. News organizations such as MLive, the Detroit Free Press, the Detroit News, and the Lansing State Journal can be powerful allies in advocating for the removal of current FOIA exemptions. In addition, we can reach out to advocacy groups such as the ACLU of Michigan and the League of Women Voters of Michigan, both of which are proponents of expanded democratic access and would be supportive of these measures. These groups can all help provide awareness of this issue and require greater public interest in legislative action.

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Combating Energy Insecurity in Binghamton, New York: Energy Scores to Overcome the Split Incentive

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THESIS

To overcome energy inefficiency brought on by the “split incentive” between renters and landlords, the Binghamton City Council should compel landlords to adopt minimum energy-efficiency standards and post energy scores to reduce energy insecurity and encourage energy-efficiency projects for low-income renters.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

One in five American households is forced to decide between paying energy bills or buying food, medicine, and other necessities.¹ Energy insecurity, defined as “the inability to meet basic household energy needs,”² affects 31 percent of American homes.³ For many low-income households, the energy burden can reach up to 33 percent of after-tax income;⁴ in Broome County, New York, households making less than 50 percent below the federal poverty level spend an average of 31.1 percent of their income on energy bills.⁵ These statistics are especially concerning given that 34 percent of residents of Binghamton, the county seat of Broome County, live in poverty.⁶ Energy insecurity amplifies other vulnerabilities experienced by low-income households and exacerbates hazardous environmental exposures, contributes to poor health, and amplifies housing insecurity.⁷ Black and Hispanic/Latinx households are more than twice as likely to face energy disconnection because of missed bill payments.⁸ Combined with the reality that one in two energy-insecure households also reports food insecurity,⁹ energy insecurity is a major human rights crisis that is “hidden in plain sight.”¹⁰

Energy efficiency (EE) upgrades have the potential to create savings of up to 55 percent, therefore offering an effective solution to decreasing energy insecurity.¹¹ The “split incentive problem,” in which low-income renters pay their own energy bills and the landlord has no incentive to pay for EE upgrades,¹² is the reason that low-income renters often live in the least energy-efficient housing units.¹³ Moreover, the split incentive is the result of information asymmetries, such that renters are not aware of how energy-efficient their units are.¹⁴ The split incentive accounts for 8.6 percent of all US residential energy use¹⁵ and acts as a barrier to EE projects such that it “is responsible for the highest degree of inefficiencies for the poorest...citizens.”¹⁶

TALKING POINTS

- Energy efficiency (EE) upgrades have the potential to simultaneously address household structural deficiencies and high energy costs while improving nationwide energy independence and mitigating climate change.¹⁷
- The split incentive acts as a major barrier to EE projects for low-income renters because renters pay the energy bill, and landlords therefore have no incentive to invest in EE upgrades.
- San Francisco’s commercial energy benchmarking program showed strong yearly savings and a reduction of 7.9 percent in overall energy usage for properties involved.¹⁸

KEY FACTS

- Households in Broome County making less than 50 percent below the federal poverty level spend an average of 31.1 percent of their income on energy bills.²⁸
- Solving the split incentive would save \$4 billion–\$11 billion per year in energy costs for low-income renters.²⁹
- In New York City, which has implemented an energy grading system, emissions have decreased 8 percent among buildings participating in energy benchmarking.³⁰

THE POLICY IDEA

To decrease energy insecurity caused by the split incentive gap, the City of Binghamton should implement minimum EE standards for rentals and mandate EE audits that score rentals based on benchmarks through an “energy score” rating. The city should also mandate the posting of the energy scores in rental buildings and real estate listings to better incentivize landlords to improve energy efficiency.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Adopting energy grades and benchmarking has been shown to reduce emissions, create a market-based incentive for landlords to install energy upgrades to their properties, and lower energy bills for low-income renters.¹⁹ Because the split incentive is a result of information asymmetries, required disclosure of a building’s energy efficiency would help fill the information gap.²⁰ One analysis notes that solving the split incentive would create \$4 billion–\$11 billion per year in energy savings for low-income renters.²¹

In Binghamton, residential buildings account for 42 percent of greenhouse gas emissions.²² In New York City, which has implemented an energy grading system, emissions have decreased 8 percent among buildings participating in energy benchmarking.²³ San Francisco’s commercial buildings that were in a benchmarking program showed a consistent annual decrease in energy consumption of 7.9 percent for three years, with audits of 800 buildings identifying \$60.6 million in potential energy savings from upgrades.²⁴ The report also noted that the expansion of the program to include mixed-use and multifamily residential property would have promise.²⁵

To avoid landlords passing on the cost of upgrades to renters²⁶—and consequently decreasing affordability for low-income renters—landlords should be encouraged to use utility on-bill financing mechanisms, which are loan programs for EE upgrades that are paid back through the utility bill and often use the savings from EE upgrades to offset the costs.²⁷ New York State Energy Research and Development Authority grant programs can also help offset any additional expenses incurred as a result of this policy.

NEXT STEPS

To increase EE projects for low-income renters and reduce energy insecurity, the Binghamton City Council must overcome the split incentive by passing a resolution setting EE benchmarks—developed through a scoring system and energy audits—and mandating the posting of energy scores. In conjunction with HeatSmart Southern Tier, an EE education and outreach nonprofit and a long-time Roosevelt @ Binghamton University partner, we will establish a coalition of local (e.g., Binghamton Community Power) and student (e.g., New York Public Interest Research Group and IDEAS) organizations to increase awareness of the issue. Roosevelt @ Binghamton University is a member of the Policy and Intersectionality working group of the New York Energy Democracy Alliance (EDA), which offers an opportunity to plug our policy into existing EDA efforts and receive support in terms of policy guidance, networks, advocacy strategy, and resources.

We plan to publish op-eds in the *Press & Sun-Bulletin* calling for improved access to EE projects for low-income populations in Binghamton and to host a public event about energy insecurity, the importance of energy efficiency, and inequities in climate policy. We will also start a petition for the policy and canvass the City of Binghamton to elevate citizens’ voices and demonstrate support for the proposal.

After building a base of supporters as well as implementing a policy advocacy campaign, we will work to meet with members of the Binghamton City Council and lobby for their support of the resolution. In particular, we hope to secure the support of Councilman Conrad Taylor, a Binghamton University alum, to introduce legislation.

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Combatting Dallas's Low Waste-Diversion Rate: Expanding Mandated Recycling to the Commercial Sector

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THESIS

To increase its low waste-diversion rate, the City of Dallas should accelerate the expansion of its multifamily residential recycling ordinance to include the commercial sector, its largest producer of waste.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The City of Dallas's Local Solid Waste Management Plan strives to achieve "zero waste" (~84 percent diversion of waste from landfills) by 2040.¹ Dallas hoped to reach a 40 percent diversion rate by 2020, but in 2016 it had achieved only a 21 percent diversion rate,² 13 percent below the national average, and estimated waste-generation rates high enough to fill city landfills by 2043.³

The city relies on voluntary improvements in recycling participation to drive diversion-rate growth. Corey Troiani from Texas Campaign for the Environment (TCE) states that "Market-based incentives did not increase recycling participation in apartments, and similar incentives are still not working for businesses." A city recycling survey found no significant improvement in recycling rates over four years, showing the failure of voluntary efforts to meaningfully change recycling participation. In fact, recycling participation among Dallas Building Owners and Managers Association members has been diminishing over the past few years, from 84 percent in 2014 to 76 percent in 2017. A similar trend has occurred among Hotel Association of North Texas members, dropping from 61 percent to 55 percent over the same period of time. (Because companies that recycle are more likely to respond to such surveys, response bias may have actually resulting in an overestimate of recycling rates, meaning that recycling participation among businesses has likely decreased more than indicated.) Businesses comprise 65 percent of the Dallas waste flow, but with the exception of single-family and multifamily apartment complexes, which will be regulated starting in 2020, regulations do not require businesses to recycle. Yet, a 2018 Commercial Waste Audit found that nearly 77 percent of waste samples in selected commercial offices, and 90 percent in sampled hotels, were potentially recyclable.²⁵

In its Local Solid Waste Management Plan, Dallas set a strict timeline outlining a series of tasks that need to be completed in order to implement a universal recycling ordinance (URO) by 2020. The city cited the need to conduct stakeholder meetings to identify strategies for "maximal feasible recycle" at all multifamily buildings and commercial establishments, identified thresholds and milestones for participation in recycling programs, and vowed to evaluate the status of voluntary participation. But according to Troiani with the TCE, "The city has put little effort into collecting meaningful recycling data from commercial businesses," undermining any possibility of sticking to its timeline.

Low waste-diversion rates affect the entire community because of construction costs for new landfills, but they disproportionately affect minority and low-income communities because of where these landfills are located. Race is a primary predictor of landfill location, and Black communities are often the sites of "dumping grounds."⁷ In Dallas, the McCommas Bluff landfill, the largest landfill in the city, is located next to a Black community. A mapping overlay of landfill construction sites on a racial breakdown of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex indicates that landfills are overwhelmingly constructed in Hispanic and Black communities. Communities located near Dallas landfills have significantly lower per-capita incomes than other communities.⁸ The frequency of health complaints from communities near landfills closely correlates with the level of noxious fumes in the air, implicating landfill proximity as a factor in increased morbidity.⁹

TALKING POINTS

- Survey data show that voluntary participation is not enough to increase commercial recycling rates.
- The URO would allow companies to choose how they wish to implement recycling programs for themselves.
- UROs that offer businesses the flexibility to choose which materials to recycle and which recycling service contractor to use have shown significant increases in recycling rates.

THE POLICY IDEA

To boost commercial recycling rates, Dallas should accelerate implementation of a URO. Modeled after similar policies in Austin, Texas, and in Seattle and in other US cities, the URO requires companies to recycle but allows them to choose a contractor and decide which materials to collect. Each business must submit an annual diversion plan to the city specifying how it will increase recycling. In turn, the city provides support and advice to help companies achieve their recycling goals.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Currently, only 21 percent of Dallas commercial waste is recycled.¹¹ Austin implemented a URO in 2012, requiring all businesses and multifamily apartments to divert their organic and recyclable waste. Since it passed, 85 percent of Austin businesses and multifamily apartments have submitted waste-diversion plans to the city.¹⁴ The city's recycling rate increased from 38 percent¹² in 2010 to 42 percent in 2015.¹³ A URO will greatly increase Dallas's diversion rate if even a portion of the businesses that do not recycle begin diverting the 85 percent of recyclable waste that they add to landfills each year.

Requesting commercial recycling plans requires fewer governmental resources than mandating a specific diversion rate. Enforcement of the latter necessitates more funding and work hours. The former provides more freedom for businesses to set their own goals, decide how to adapt, and choose their own recycling pickup contractor. Because there are no penalties involved, businesses without the financial capacity to recycle are not in danger of fines; rather, they are coached on how to implement recycling within their means. Furthermore, although the addition of recycling pickup services may increase initial costs, long-term increases in recycling lead to decreased frequency of trash pickups and lower system-wide costs.¹⁵ In addition, increasing waste-diversion rates would decrease landfill deposition rates, slowing the adverse health effects that waste-processing sites pose to nearby minority and low-income communities.^{16,17,18} Increasing recycling rates also creates living-wage jobs; recycling collection alone creates more than 2.5 times as many jobs, requiring various levels of skill and in multiple locations within a city, as landfill disposal does.¹⁹

NEXT STEPS

The implementation of a URO depends on raising awareness for the issue among stakeholders. Developing support for the commercial aspect of the URO will continue and augment five years of collaboration between TCE and major commercial interest groups. Bimonthly meetings will bring small businesses and other trade associations into these discussions. Including other stakeholders, such as recycling pickup services and residents who live near landfills, is important. We will create and present GIS prediction maps of commercial recycling patterns before and after URO implementation, gathered through surveys of local businesses. Recommendations from all stakeholder meetings and mapping visuals will be sent to Dallas City Council Committee on Quality of Life, Arts & Culture committee, the entity in charge of drafting the eventual URO.

Advocacy is integral to successfully implementing the policy. All information will be communicated to the public as op-eds in the Dallas Morning News and other influential news sources. We will work with our campus's Green Initiative and Sustainability Club to further promote our idea. Volunteer support from the UT Dallas Office of Sustainability will be essential to passing this Dallas ordinance. With these recommendations and data in hand, the Dallas City Council should be well positioned to draft and then pass a URO.

KEY FACTS

- Dallas hotels, apartments, and office buildings only diverted 14 percent of their waste in 2015, and only 44 percent of those surveyed had recycling services.²⁰
- Dallas's diversion rate was 21 percent in 2016, despite the city setting a goal of 90 percent diversion by 2040.¹⁰
- Austin's URO has helped it reach a diversion rate of 42 percent, an increase from 38 percent^{22, 23}

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Mission Emission: Increasing Climate Change Accountability at the University of Georgia through Internal Carbon Pricing

By Theodore Vincent, Tarun Ramesh, and Emma Tucker

Roosevelt @ University of Georgia

THESIS

To combat the effects of anthropogenic climate change and promote accountability within public higher education, the University of Georgia should implement an internal carbon pricing policy that incentivizes carbon emission reduction and increased student engagement.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Climate change poses the most significant threat of our time, with its effects already manifesting as widespread droughts, powerful hurricanes, and rising sea levels.¹ Though the impact of climate change is global, its ramifications are not evenly felt. Low-income, coastal, and agricultural communities will suffer disproportionately because of their constrained ability to prepare for and respond to erratic weather patterns.² If left unchecked, climate change is expected to depress the US economy by 10 percent and displace millions of citizens by 2100.³ Within Georgia, a state that is vulnerable to flooding and hurricanes and that has a high poverty rate, the effects of climate change have already begun to take a toll on local economies.⁴ Hurricane Michael destroyed more than \$1 billion in Georgia crops in October 2018, and projections indicate that almost 420 square miles of state coastline will be lost to sea level rise by 2100, destroying coastal communities and industries.^{5,6}

Atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, the largest single contributor to climate change, have increased from 280 parts per million (ppm) to 409 ppm over the past 150 years.⁷ Though the majority of carbon dioxide production stems from livestock farming and industrial processes, institutions of higher learning are also contributors, accounting for ~2 percent of annual US greenhouse gas emissions.⁸ The University of Georgia (UGA) produced 319,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the 2014 fiscal year, the equivalent of burning approximately 36 million gallons of gasoline.⁹ Energy, including electricity and heating fuels, accounts for 84 percent of UGA's carbon dioxide production and costs the university more than \$18 million annually.¹⁰ A land and sea grant institution, UGA has a responsibility to protect the state's natural resources, coastlines, and ecosystems.¹⁴ It should uphold that responsibility, and meet its stated goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020, by instituting an internal carbon pricing model.

TALKING POINTS

- Cutting UGA's electricity consumption will decrease spending and present a promising, achievable opportunity for reducing UGA's carbon emissions.
- Since 2010, the University Office of Sustainability has worked with the Climate Action Task Force to update the university's greenhouse gas emissions database. This model could pull from the existing record to track of each department's success in cutting carbon emissions.
- A 5 percent yearly reduction can be accomplished through a combination of small, concrete adjustments, such as unplugging desktops, turning off overhead lights in areas with natural lighting, or transition to more-energy-efficient light bulbs.

KEY FACTS

- UGA's 2020 strategic plan calls for a greenhouse gas emission reduction of 20 percent by 2020, from a 2010 baseline.⁹
- By 2110, nearly 50 percent of residential land, 48 percent of land used for transportation purposes, and 30 percent of commercial land is projected to be inundated on Georgia's barrier islands.⁶
- More than 1,200 companies and 30 colleges and universities worldwide have implemented or intend to implement internal carbon pricing as a cost-friendly solution to rising carbon dioxide emissions.¹⁵

THE POLICY IDEA

UGA should create a target reduction internal carbon charge that offers rebates to departments whose buildings exceed the target 5 percent net reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and issues financial penalties to departments that fail to cut their emissions by the same metric.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Institutions of higher education offer a unique opportunity for dual intervention: to both reduce carbon dioxide emissions and increase environmental engagement among faculty and students. An internal carbon pricing model at UGA would inspire the creation of innovative and cost-effective solutions to reduce the university's environmental footprint. As proven by the current success at Yale University, a redistributive system that rebates and charges groups based on average emissions reduction effectively improves overall sustainability at a given institution. Since the launch of Yale's Carbon Charge, in 2017, the university has reduced its carbon emissions across 250 buildings and saved an estimate of \$40 per ton of carbon dioxide not generated from the burning of fossil fuels.¹³ Similar studies have also been piloted at Vassar College and Swarthmore College, with each taking original ideas in their implementation approaches.¹² For instance, at Vassar, student engagement was prioritized, and it resulted in a boosted interest in sustainability university-wide, even promoting an uptick in the number students enrolling in environmentally related majors.¹¹

Although carbon pricing models have prospered at small, private universities, implementation at UGA would prove that implementation at a large, public university is feasible. UGA's scale will provide challenges, but it is possible to adapt the Yale model and tailor it to the needs of the university and surrounding Athens, Georgia, community. Involving the student body would serve the dual purpose of educating undergraduates from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds about an important global issue and encouraging more environmentally friendly habits in individual, day-to-day life.¹¹

A 5 percent yearly net reduction in carbon dioxide emissions would enable UGA to be carbon-neutral in 20 years. An internal carbon charge could help departments generate money to improve their operations¹¹ and encourage departments to use less energy, thus lowering their utility bills. In effect, a properly implemented carbon charge could provide UGA with a solution mutually beneficial to the university's budget and the environment while promoting large institutions nationwide to take action themselves.

Through redistributive carbon pricing and engagement initiatives, costs will be offset by administration appropriated funds, UGA sustainability grants, and the Environmental Protection Agency's P3—People, Prosperity and the Planet program. Financial resources would be primarily dedicated to investment in individual energy meters for further expansion of pilot programs.

NEXT STEPS

An interdisciplinary task force, including economics professors, environmental science professors, students, community coalition leaders, and administrators, has been created to oversee a carbon pricing initiative. Task force investigations of carbon pricing effectiveness at Vassar, Yale, and Swarthmore have indicated the feasibility of such a policy.¹² Through its Office of Sustainability, the university already engages in multiple environmental protection programs, including natural coastline defenses, reforestation programs, and solar subsidies; that infrastructure can be extended to encompass the new carbon pricing task force.

Further steps include garnering community support within the greater UGA community. Administrative contacts include David Williams, who serves as the head of the university's honors program, David Mustard (Economics), Quint Newcomer (Ecology), and members of the Office of Sustainability. Other task force members would include UGA students, Athens community college representatives, and officials from Athens-Clarke County Unified Government. The coalition will prioritize inclusion of students from a variety of disciplines, including members of the Athens Tech Sustainability Office, UGArden, the Lunchbox Project, and the Society for Conservation Biology. We will reach out to Casey Pickett, who directs the Yale Carbon Charge initiative, and others with experience in carbon pricing at institutes of higher education. Their expertise will help us shape and reform our policy to make sure that it is politically viable and implementable.

Successful implementation of our policy requires support from Jere Morehead, the current president of UGA, and the University System of Georgia Board of Regents, which can help us determine the scalability of the pilot program and potential for enacting this policy across all college campuses in Georgia.

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Comprehensive Sex Education: Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health in Georgia

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THESIS

To empower students with accurate and inclusive information, the Georgia General Assembly and Georgia Board of Education should require statewide sex-education curricula to be medically correct and to include information about protective sexual practices, consent, and diverse sexualities.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The state of Georgia has failed to protect the sexual and reproductive health of its citizens. In 2010, 60 percent of all pregnancies in the state were unintended—the second highest rate in the US.¹ Georgia also ranks in the top five states for rates of gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia.² Despite these alarming statistics, Georgia public schools continue to offer sex education that omits the information necessary to prevent such outcomes.

Georgia law mandates sex and HIV education but does not require related curricula to be medically accurate, age-appropriate, culturally appropriate, unbiased, or secular. Instead, sex education in Georgia public schools must stress abstinence until marriage and emphasize the negative outcomes of adolescent sexual activity. Information about condoms, sexual orientation, consent, sexual coercion, healthy decision-making, and family communication is not required.³ State laws also give local school boards broad discretion in developing and implementing sex-education curricula that comply with standards prescribed by the state board of education.⁴ As a result, sex education in Georgia varies dramatically among schools. More than one-third of high schools statewide use an abstinence-based program called “Choosing the Best,” and in fiscal year 2017, only 13.4 percent of secondary schools provided information relevant to LGBTQ+ youth.^{5,6} The incomplete and misleading education that Georgia adolescents currently receive fails to prepare them for reality and renders them vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unhealthy relationships.

KEY FACTS

- 60 percent of all Georgia pregnancies were unintended in 2010, making Georgia’s the second highest rate in the US.ⁱ
- Georgia leads the nation in STI rates, ranking third in the country for gonorrhea, fourth for syphilis, and fifth for chlamydia.ⁱⁱ
- Georgia is one of 27 states that require sex-education curricula to stress abstinence as a method of pregnancy and STI prevention.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Students who receive comprehensive sex education are 50 percent less likely to become pregnant than those who receive abstinence-only sex education.^{vii,viii,ix}

TALKING POINTS

- Sexual health and reproductive freedom depend on access to accurate, unbiased, and inclusive information.
- Georgia’s high rates of teen pregnancy and STIs indicate the failure of abstinence-centered sex education to prevent adverse outcomes.^{i,ii}
- The nationwide pervasiveness of sexual assault and the disproportionate vulnerability of LGBTQ+ individuals to STIs and sexual violence underscore the need for education addressing consent and healthy relationships for students of all sexualities.^{xv,xvi,xvii}
- Implementing a standardized, comprehensive sex-education curriculum across K–12 public schools would empower all Georgians to make informed and autonomous decisions about their sexual relationships and reproductive futures.

THE POLICY IDEA

The Georgia General Assembly should amend Section 20-2-143 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated to require inclusion of protective sexual practices, consent, and sexual orientation in statewide sex-education standards; to extend the required duration of education on sexual-abuse and sexual-assault prevention through grade 12; and to mandate that all sex-education curricula be medically accurate according to an independent committee of health professionals. The Georgia Board of Education should subsequently amend State Board Rule 160-4-2-.12, Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Program Plan, to comply with these amendments.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Students who participate in comprehensive sex-education programs that cover HIV and contraception in addition to abstinence are at a 50 percent lower risk of pregnancy than students who receive abstinence-only education.^{7,8,9} A nationwide study of successful comprehensive programs found that 40 percent were associated with delayed onset of sexual activity, reduced number of sexual partners, and increased condom use, while 60 percent were associated with a reduction in unprotected sex.^{10,11,12}

Because many current sexuality education programs do not emphasize skills for healthy relationships, young people are especially at risk of violent relationships and rape.^{13,14} Furthermore, LGBTQ+ individuals are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, HIV infection, and STIs.^{15,16,17} Abstinence-only education fosters a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ youth by reproducing outdated gender stereotypes and homophobia.¹⁸ Sexuality education that addresses healthy practices for all relationships, including relationships among LGBTQ+ individuals, would empower all youth to reduce miscommunication, conflict, and harm in romantic and sexual encounters.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Medical Association, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, and the American Academy of Pediatrics have all endorsed comprehensive programs as the gold standard of sexuality education. Furthermore, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, the Future of Sex Education, Advocates for Youth, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization have already developed comprehensive sexuality-education curricula that would enable Georgia to circumvent the costly and tedious process of creating a new program.^{19,20,21,22} These curricula include medically accurate facts about human development and information about interpersonal skills, and they encourage students to respect and affirm the sexual preferences and orientations of themselves and their peers. In 2014, DeKalb County began using such a curriculum, which included information about contraception options and interpersonal communication in alignment with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Health Education Standards for Sexual Health and the National Sexuality Education Standards. Changes in DeKalb County's STI and teen pregnancy rates could be evaluated in comparison to abstinence-only counties in order to assess the curriculum's effectiveness and inform future expansions.²³

NEXT STEPS

We will assemble a committee of allies committed to reproductive justice to collaborate on research and advocacy efforts. These allies include the Medical Association of Georgia, Georgia Public Health Association, Georgia Association of Educators, Georgia Parent Teacher Association, GLSEN Atlanta, American Sexual Health Association, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and Planned Parenthood Southeast. Building a coalition with these local, state, and national organizations will help us to present a united front and mobilize a diverse base of supporters while lobbying for the proposed policy change at the Georgia State Capitol. In particular, we will meet with State Rep. Brooks Coleman and State Sen. John Wilkinson to present the proposed policy change. We will encourage these legislators to introduce a bill that would amend Section 20-2-143 to require comprehensive sex education across all public K-12 schools in Georgia.

To comply with amended legislation, the state board of education should assemble an independent task force of health professionals, educators, and LGBTQ+ advocates to develop comprehensive sex-education requirements under State Board Rule 160-4-2-.12. The board should also establish a procedure for this task force to review all sex-education curricula proposed by local school boards for accuracy, objectivity, and inclusivity.

Our coalition will launch a coordinated social media campaign to raise awareness about the public health risks of abstinence-only sex education and encourage community members to support the proposed policy change by participating in public forums, engaging their state representatives, and calling for change in their local communities.

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Workforce Empowerment and Career Advancement through ESL Curricula for Immigrants in Nonprofessional Health Care Roles

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THESIS

By offering supplementary health care and research-specific ESL coursework to nonprofessional immigrant health care workers, City Colleges of Chicago will enhance resource training regarding unfair labor practices and minimize educational mismatches in academic and workplace setting.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

From nursing homes to university hospital systems, nonprofessional health care workers, such as certified nursing assistants (CNAs) and home health aides (HHAs), form the backbone of American health care delivery.¹ Immigrants fill a large percentage of those nonprofessional roles, comprising more than 17 percent of all psychiatric and nursing aides, 16 percent of all clinical technicians,² and 25 percent of all direct-care workers. Women and women of color are especially overrepresented in all sectors.^{3,4}

These numbers will only increase: Health care service is currently growing at an unprecedented rate, with the US Department of Labor projecting a 26 percent growth in home health care and 15 percent growth in nursing by 2026.⁵ The growth in this sector will demand a more robust workforce augmented by immigrant and minority health care workers already qualified under comparatively robust standards. Indeed, health care roles have increasingly been filled by nonprofessional, immigrant workers since 1980, as the baby boomer population started coming of age.^{6,7}

But instead of offering rewarding career opportunities for immigrant and minority health care workers, nonprofessional health care roles often fail to offer adequate career advancement, devalue transferable skills gained from previous foreign certification or experience, and even violate basic employee rights. Nonprofessional health care roles, such as nursing, CNA, and HHA jobs, tend to be labor-intensive, poorly regulated, and nonunionized; the number of nursing-home union contracts have decreased from 14.6 percent to 9.9 percent in the last 30 years.⁸ Workers in these roles are often overqualified because cultural and socioeconomic barriers create skills mismatches.^{9,10} These jobs notoriously promote gendered and racializing labor practices among vulnerable populations.¹¹ Consequently, 24 percent of home care workers live in households with incomes below the federal poverty line,¹² and 50 percent of all home health care workers rely on public assistance—with 89 percent of them women, 30 percent African American, and 16 percent Latinx.^{13,14} Roles tend to be decentralized and far from organization support structures.¹⁵ Reports of dissatisfaction in these roles correlate to overtime violations, wage theft, and high turnover rates.¹⁶

Offering English as a second language (ESL) training for immigrants and minorities in nonprofessional health care roles will create pathways for a more fair workplace experience, academic and career advancement, and a more representative health care workforce. Specifically, medical and research-oriented ESL courses can equip workers to better navigate employment and academic environments while creating safe spaces to discuss workplace grievances without fear of employer reprisal.

KEY FACTS

- 50 percent of all home health care workers rely on public assistance, 89 percent of whom are women, 30 percent African American, and 16 percent Latinx.^{22,23}
- Workers in these roles tend to be overqualified, having higher percentages of higher-education degrees than their US-born peers, and are generally older, with a median age of 48.²⁴
- A quarter of the 334,000 college-educated immigrants older than 25 in the labor force are employed in the low-skilled jobs or unemployed, compared with 17 percent of their US-born peers,²⁵ highlighting the need for cohort-specific advocacy in the labor market.

TALKING POINTS

- Immigrants are filling a larger and larger percentage of essential, nonprofessional health care roles.
- Immigrants with college degrees outnumber US-born peers by 14.6 percent in nursing, 12.7 percent in technician roles, and 10.8 percent in health care support roles,¹⁷ suggesting skills mismatches underutilizing a potentially considerable educated workforce.¹⁸
- 24 percent of home care workers live in households with incomes below the federal poverty line and collect wages that have not kept up with inflation during the past 10 years.¹⁹
- Medical and research-oriented ESL courses equip workers to better navigate and advance in health care and academic environments.

THE POLICY IDEA

By offering accessible health care and research-oriented English as a second language (ESL) programs for immigrants and minorities in nonprofessional health care roles, City Colleges of Chicago will help mitigate educational mismatches in academic and workplace settings. This supplemental curriculum will provide entry opportunities for career advancement and, with the potential to enhance resource training against unfair labor practices, workforce empowerment for historically underrepresented cohorts.

POLICY ANALYSIS

For immigrant and minority workers, many cultural barriers exist that prevent educational and career advancement. Health care career advancement largely occurs through the lens of academic or workplace experience portfolios, and nonprofessional immigrant workers, who often lack such portfolios, are systematically excluded from advancement opportunities. Yet immigrants with college degrees outnumber US-born peers by 14.6 percent in nursing, 12.7 percent in technician roles, and 10.8 percent in health care support roles, suggesting skills mismatches that underutilize a considerably well-educated workforce.

Health care and research-oriented ESL curricula can help break down some cultural barriers by bridging the industry and academic language gap. For example, UC San Diego Extension programs offer medical English courses, designed to help health care providers improve their medical vocabulary and their ability to communicate in English in a clinical setting. Other private educators and nonprofits provide similar curricula, but public institutions remain the more accessible option. The City Colleges of Chicago consortium of schools serves more than 80,000 students in both traditional and nontraditional academic settings, offering a targeted and broadly effective venue through which to close serious opportunity gaps in career advancement.²⁰

Traditionally, labor organizers must navigate sensitive on-site work environments where their presence may introduce risk and insecurity to workers. Medical and research-oriented ESL classes can also provide resource training to help prevent exploitation and function as space for organizing without fear of retaliation by employers.

NEXT STEPS

City Colleges of Chicago should introduce a task force to design a health care and research-oriented ESL curriculum to be incorporated into its ESL and Career Bridges program.²¹ The collegiate system should first survey nurses, nursing aids, home health workers, and other health care workers to gauge educational and workforce needs. City Colleges of Chicago can also review current its curriculum for potential areas of improvement through Racial Equity Impact Assessments and inclusivity audits. Preliminary curricula may use existing medical English courses as models but should further expand through partnerships with labor advocacy groups and academic centers, such as the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute of Minority Health Research. Potential allies may include United Working Families, 25th Ward Independent Political Organization, and SEIU Local 73, which can offer insight on labor rights awareness training. Immigrant and minority labor-advocacy organizations, such as Upwardly Global, can guide the conversation on stakeholders' specific needs.

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Expanding Access to Life-Saving Hepatitis C Treatment by Removing Discriminatory Sobriety Restrictions

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THESIS

To expand access to direct-acting antivirals (DAAs) for people with hepatitis C who inject recreational drugs, the New York State Department of Health Drug Utilization Review Board should eliminate the state Medicaid pharmacy program's sobriety restrictions, thereby saving lives and reducing costs.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Hepatitis C Virus infection (HCV) is the most common chronic bloodborne infection in the US.^{1,2} Left untreated, it can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death.³ HCV disproportionately affects historically marginalized populations, including people who are homeless,⁴ who are incarcerated,⁵ or who inject drugs.⁶ An estimated 70 percent of the more than 200,000 HCV-infected New Yorkers are people who inject drugs.^{7,8}

Direct-acting antivirals (DAAs) are promising new drugs that target the specific proteins of the hepatitis C virus to disrupt its replication.⁹ Because these medications boast cure rates of higher than 90 percent,¹⁰ they have been hailed as a cure for hepatitis C.¹¹ Unfortunately, DAAs currently available to patients are prohibitively expensive—they can cost between \$54,600–\$94,500 per 8-to-12-week cycle.¹² Exorbitant DAA prices have caused many state Medicaid programs to limit the availability of these drugs through a variety of bureaucratic restrictions. Currently, New York State's Medicaid program impedes many New Yorkers from accessing these life-saving medications by employing sobriety restrictions.¹³ The state's Medicaid Fee-For-Service (FFS) pharmacy program requires screening for substance and alcohol use to determine “treatment readiness,”^{14,15} and five major Medicaid managed-care organizations likewise employ sobriety restrictions.¹⁶ Proponents of these restrictions argue that users of recreational injection drugs should be excluded from antiviral therapy because they are unlikely to adhere to treatment.¹⁷ In reality, mounting evidence demonstrates that sobriety is a poor indicator of psychosocial treatment readiness, and that when people who inject drugs are provided with adequate social support, they are just as likely to adhere to DAA treatment regimens as their abstinent counterparts.^{18,19} According to official guidance provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,²⁰ by “imposing conditions for coverage that may unreasonably restrict access to these drugs,” New York's use of sobriety restrictions violates the statutory requirements of section 1927 of the Social Security Act.²¹ These sobriety restrictions serve to unreasonably curtail access to life-saving medication for people who inject drugs.

TALKING POINTS

- The sobriety restrictions included in the New York State Department of Health's Chronic Hepatitis C Infection Check List for Prior Authorization Requests unfairly preclude people who inject drugs—who comprise a majority of HCV patients—from accessing treatment.²²
- Sobriety is a poor indicator of “treatment readiness”; people who inject drugs are just as likely to adhere to direct-acting antivirals (DAA) therapy when provided with appropriate social supports.²³
- Though HCV DAAs may seem prohibitively expensive, they are, in fact, cost-saving when compared to the existing standard-of-care treatment (i.e., interferon therapy)^{24,25} or the high costs associated with cirrhosis, liver failure, and other complications that develop from untreated HCV.²⁶
- Removing sobriety restrictions would expand access to treatment for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and save money in the long run.

THE POLICY IDEA

To expand access to DAAs, the New York State Department of Health Medicaid Drug Utilization Review Board should abolish sobriety restrictions for the Medicaid FFS pharmacy program. In addition, it should collaborate with managed-care organizations to ensure that DAA prior authorization procedures are consistent across FFS and managed-care pharmacy benefits.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Thirteen states have already removed sobriety requirements from DAA prescribing guidelines, and several states, including New Mexico, Michigan, and Virginia, specify that a patient cannot be denied treatment for the sole reason of substance use.²⁷ New York should not only abolish all sobriety restrictions, but also make it explicitly clear that physicians cannot unreasonably exclude injection drug users from antiviral therapy.

Some argue that, because people who inject drugs are unlikely to adhere to treatment, providing them with DAAs is an inefficient use of public funds. However, there is a growing body of evidence that people who inject drugs are just as likely to adhere to treatment when they are provided with appropriate social supports.²⁸ Moreover, because people who inject drugs constitute 70 percent of HCV-infected Medicaid recipients,^{29,30,31} the use of sobriety restrictions impedes the majority of hepatitis C patients from getting the lifesaving treatment that they need. Without access to appropriate treatment, these individuals may develop serious health complications that will require even greater healthcare expenditures (i.e., liver transplantation).³²

Seventy-six percent of state Medicaid hepatitis C patients receive treatment through managed-care organizations, not the Medicaid FFS pharmacy program.³³ Therefore, any proposed effort to amend Medicaid prescribing guidelines for DAAs must be enforced among managed-care organizations. Prior attempts by activist groups to reform restrictive DAA prescribing guidelines demonstrate that if standardized DAA authorization criteria are not enforced across FFS and managed-care organizations, such reforms are, at best, symbolic.³⁴ Transparency and enforcement across managed-care organizations will ensure DAA coverage parity across both FFS and managed-care programs.³⁵

Expanding access to antiviral therapy would actually reduce healthcare expenditures by averting HCV-induced liver disease. Liver cirrhosis accounts for more than two-thirds of the \$4.3 billion to \$8.3 billion spent annually caring for people with hepatitis C.³⁶ Thus, by decreasing the incidence of severe liver disease, DAAs actually reduce the lifetime treatment costs associated with hepatitis C. The societal value of antiviral therapy—\$197,574 per person³⁷—far exceeds its sticker price.

NEXT STEPS

Implementing this proposal would require approval from the New York State Department of Health Medicaid Drug Utilization Review Board, which is charged with establishing clinical standards for the State's Medicaid pharmacy program.³⁸ One potential ally in this process is Voices Of Community Activists & Leaders (VOCAL-NY), a statewide grassroots organization that advocates for low-income people affected by blood-borne illnesses, including hepatitis C.³⁹ Because VOCAL-NY has experience effectively advocating for the board to reform its DAA prescribing guidelines, it would be an invaluable partner throughout this process.⁴⁰ I will organize VOCAL-NY members and students to testify before the Drug Utilization Review Board during the 90-minute public comment period at the beginning of its next meeting. Through personal testimony and rigorously established objective evidence, I aim to engender a dialogue about this issue among members of the board. I will also collaborate with VOCAL-NY to launch a social media campaign highlighting the lived experiences of HCV-infected New Yorkers personally affected by discriminatory sobriety restrictions. This social media campaign will serve to illustrate the substantive impact that authorization requirements have on the lives of New Yorkers.

In addition, ensuring DAA coverage parity across FFS and managed-care providers would require the cooperation of the state Department of Health Office of Insurance Program's Hepatitis C Workgroup, which was first convened in 2014 to "develop standardized [DAA authorization] criteria to be used across FFS and managed care."⁴¹

KEY FACTS

- 70 percent of New Yorkers living with HCV are people who inject drugs (PWID).⁴²
- The five HCV DAAs currently available to patients are prohibitively expensive and can cost between \$54,600–\$94,500 per 8-to-12-week cycle.⁴³
- 35 percent of Medicaid recipients with hepatitis C are routinely denied coverage for their prescription treatment.⁴⁴

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Opt-Out Intake Counseling: A Preventative Approach to Mental Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago

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THESIS

To address rising demand by students for mental health care services, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) should implement mandatory opt-out intake sessions with counselors allocated to each college of the university.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

An alarming number of UIC student who believe that they have mental health issues are not seeking help from the university counseling center. Out of the 453 UIC students surveyed, 67 percent report “often” experiencing symptoms of depression or other mood disorders, and 51 percent have experienced suicidal ideations. Yet, 55 percent of UIC students have never received therapy that would address their mental health.¹

Although associated stigma around mental-health treatment could account for these statistics,² a stronger explanation is the decrease in on-campus mental health resources. Rising demand for mental health services at UIC have not been matched with adequate resources. From 2013 to 2017, the number of students visiting the UIC counseling center increased by 19 percent, from 1,189 to 1,465 students, while the number of full-time employees at the center increased by only 15 percent, from 13 to 15.³ This reality parallels national trends, which shows that students who visit counseling centers are increasingly likely to have severe psychological issues,⁴ even though, on average, long-term treatment services have decreased.⁵ The International Association of Counseling Services (IASC), which is the accreditation association for university, four-year college, and two-year community college counseling services, recommends that universities have one professional counselor for every 1,000 to 1,500 students.⁶ Were this policy to be in place at UIC, there would be a minimum of 21 counselors for the 31,683 students currently enrolled.

The dearth of counselors is reflected in an average wait time of 14–21 days for counseling services. The counseling center is increasingly advising students to seek help at community clinics, campus hotlines, and group therapy to handle the growing demand for services. However, these stop-gap alternatives are not adequate solutions, especially considering that more than half of Chicago’s mental health clinics have closed in recent years.⁷

Students exhibiting mental health distress who do not receive care are at higher risk of dropping out.⁸ Among those identified as experiencing symptoms of depression, just 30 percent strongly agreed that they would ultimately graduate.⁹ Minority students, in particular, face additional systemic barriers to accessing mental health treatment and are more likely than white students to delay or fail to seek mental health treatment.¹⁰

TALKING POINTS

- A majority of students at UIC claim to experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, or other mood disorders at some point during their college career.¹
- As the counseling center attempts to meet rising demand for services, students who have not yet reached “crisis level” risk slipping through the cracks because of long wait times. The counseling center at UIC needs to dramatically increase services to resolve this disparity.
- The opt-out policy de-stigmatizes mental health by normalizing the concept of counseling and treatment while also providing first-line preventative care to reduce the risk of crises down the line.

THE POLICY IDEA

UIC should provide an opt-out counseling intake program in which all enrolled students participate in mental health counseling with a certified counselor at least once during their undergraduate career. This system would follow the existing model of academic advising that all degree-seeking undergrads are expected to complete while attending UIC. Counselors, embedded within each college of the university, would familiarize themselves with each college's academic culture. Necessary increases in operating costs would derive from a nominal increase of the Health Service Fee already imposed on all enrolled students.

POLICY ANALYSIS

The policy proposal models the existing system of academic advising students now participate in at UIC. Current university policy mandates that degree-seeking undergrads see an assigned academic adviser at least once per semester to address any academic concerns and ensure that students stay on track for graduation. However, these academic advisers are unqualified to deal with issues relating to mental health. By recommending that all students see a wellness counselor during their first year to assess and address any underlying mental health or emotional needs, the university could enable the counseling center to take a more preventative and holistic approach to supporting students' health. Moreover, the policy would decrease the knowledge gap of available health care resources on campus, reduce the stigma that surrounds mental health among young adults, and mitigate the possibility of students falling through the cracks—especially students at risk of developing mental illness.

The “opt-out” option would allow students to waive an intake assessment. Hiring counseling staff to work within the colleges would lower the counselor-to-student ratio to meet the IACS benchmark. A nominal monetary increase to the existing UIC-mandated Health Service Fee¹¹ alongside an increase in the counseling center's budget would fund these additional counselors.

NEXT STEPS

We will implement a pilot program for one incoming class of the university by working with the director of the counseling center and dean of the college. We will embed counselors within the colleges so that the ratio of students to psychologists is no more than 1,000 students per psychologist. To do this, we will identify funding opportunities within the student fee structure to realign more funding for counselors; for example, the university could increase the \$92 student health services fee or lobby the state government for increased funding. We will design and distribute an internal survey to a statistically significant sample of the student body to gather insight on a hypothetical increase in student fees. Should students respond positively to such a proposal, we will work to put the proposition on the ballot during student body elections. Contingent on student approval, we will work closely with the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) as well as the UIC Senate in developing a resolution focused on appropriating additional funds for the Counseling Center.

Should the pilot program be funded and implemented, we will advise the university to analyze the effectiveness of the model by noting the numbers and types of students utilizing the intake sessions, those continuing with mental health care, and those seeking care outside of the university counseling center. If the pilot program is effective and sustainable for two years, the university should expand it to all students.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We created a policy to enact a temporary \$10 Mental Health Fee earmarked for hiring new counselors, which is backed by undergraduate and graduate student governments and has student approval, receiving a 66% vote of support in an undergraduate student government election referendum. Recently, the UIC Senate voted to pass a resolution backing the proposal.

KEY FACTS

- Recommended staffing guidelines are 1,000 to 1,500 students for every psychologist, but UIC has 7,337 students for every psychologist.¹²
- Demand for services at the counseling center is reflected in a 19 percent increase, from 1,189 to 1,465 students. Yet the center added the equivalent of only one full-time counselor between 2013 and 2017.
- Nationally, 63.4 percent of university students reported feeling overwhelming by anxiety, 12.1 percent seriously considered suicide, and 41.9 percent felt so depressed that they struggled to function.^{13, 14}

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