



IDEAS

*A Journal of Policy Ideas from
Across the Roosevelt Network*



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Who We Are

The Roosevelt Network trains, develops, and supports emerging progressive policymakers, researchers, and advocates, focusing on communities historically denied political power. With locations on campuses and in cities in nearly 40 US states, the network is founded on the principle that changing who writes the rules can help fulfill the promise of American democracy and build true public power. The network supports student-led, scalable policy campaigns that fight for the equitable provision, distribution, and accessibility of public goods at the campus, local, and state levels. In addition to its student-led activities, the organization leverages the power of its alumni network—which includes public officials, lawyers, teachers, nonprofit executives, and researchers—to expand opportunities for the next generation of policy leaders. A program of the Roosevelt Institute, the network operates alongside leading economists and political scientists to bring the ideals of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt into the 21st century.

What You're Holding

Now in its 12th edition, the Roosevelt Network's *10 Ideas* journal is a testament to the importance of changing who writes the rules. While this journal isn't a policy agenda of our network, it does highlight the issue areas most important to our students: education, the economy, human rights, and climate. The 10 student-developed policy proposals in this journal are visionary but also scalable. They chart bold new ways to deploy public power for the public good, spanning issue areas and geographies. Each proposal is the product of at least six months of work; as such, they were drafted and largely finalized before the global coronavirus pandemic and subsequent economic collapse, and before the recent Black Lives Matter protests and movement to defund the police. Authors went through a process of identifying a problem, conducting formal research, and organizing and collaborating with local organizations and partners, plus an intensive editing and review period that includes feedback from Roosevelt staff and alumni.

How You Can Participate

To learn more about our work and how to get involved, follow us on Twitter and Instagram at @RooseveltNTWRK and visit our website www.rooseveltinstitute.org. Together, we can change who writes the rules and help fulfill the ideals of American democracy, revive our economy, and build true public power. Thank you for reading and supporting the work of Rooseveltters.

Dear Readers,

Even before the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis, we've been living in a moment eerily parallel to the time of FDR and Eleanor. Right-wing populism and oligarchy are on the rise around the globe, and vast inequality is entrenched in our economy. Racial injustice and human rights violations are top of mind as the world mourns George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the many Black lives stolen by police brutality. And on top of all that, the climate crisis intensifies.

What this moment is driving home is what many of us have long understood: Around the world, governments are falling woefully short of their duty to build economies that work for all and failing to deploy their power to ensure that the public goods and services everyone needs to thrive are accessible to all. In the midst of the pandemic in the United States, people are losing their jobs and employer-provided health care, while essential workers—grocery store clerks, janitors, delivery people, medical workers—aren't being adequately compensated as they put their lives on the line. In this white supremacist system, the police and pandemic have killed Black people at disproportionate rates.

The policies in this journal were written during the fall of 2019—before the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic—but reflect an urgency that has only heightened in the time since their writing. As the authors demonstrate, inaction carries profound consequences for people's lives, as we've seen so clearly in recent months.

Rooseveltians think globally and act locally, and we often push for long-term structural change by way of mitigating immediate threats to our communities. The policies in this journal explore increasing legal representation for people facing eviction in South Bend, Indiana; expanding access to HIV testing for secondary school students in Georgia; and fighting for more legal representation for asylum seekers in Texas. They uphold the legacy of Eleanor and FDR in a moment when learning from and building on that legacy is more important than ever. The times ahead of us are uncertain, but we know from the past that government can work well for its people, and that expanding public power—government of, by, and for all of us—is the only way we can confront this global moment.

I'm honored to be in this movement and in this fight with every one of you.

Onward,



Katie Kirchner
National Director

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Reforming Tax-Exempt Status of Massachusetts Private Schools to Protect Transgender Students

By Evelyn Rubinchik

Roosevelt @ Northeastern University

THESIS:

To mandate the protection of transgender students at private schools, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should alter the language of state regulations so that only schools that uphold nondiscrimination on the basis of gender identity will be granted tax-exempt status. This measure would lower rates of harassment and eliminate detrimental mental health impacts.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The inequalities that transgender students experience when seeking educational opportunities are detrimental to their quality of life, as this lack of access is directly tied to income, dependence on public safety net programs, and incarceration rates. The *Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* found that harassment of transgender students was so severe that it led to 15 percent of respondents leaving school. Of those sampled, 78 percent reported harassment by teachers or staff, with 35 percent reporting physical assault and 12 percent reporting sexual assault (Grant 2011).

In 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) passed *An Act Relative to Gender Identity*, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender identity against students who attend public school. In the few years that this act has been implemented, it has already had a positive impact on the lives of transgender students in Massachusetts public schools, as the rate of physical attacks on trans students has dropped from the national average of 24 percent to 16 percent in-state. Similarly, the rate of sexual assault of trans students, 6 percent, is less than half the national rate of 13 percent (USTS 2015). However, no such protection is offered for transgender students who attend private schools, where they are often prohibited from wearing clothing, using facilities, and participating in athletic activities that are in accordance with their gender identities. In addition, students often lose their right to privacy through the disclosure of information regarding their biological sex or transition (MDESE 2012).

The lack of equality for transgender students at private schools must be addressed urgently, as data show that discrimination not only impacts students' academic results, but also has lifelong implications on future income, incarceration, health, suicidality, and even life span (Grant 2011).

TALKING POINTS

- Private schools are not subject to the Massachusetts law that mandates nondiscrimination on the basis of gender identity at public and charter schools.
- Transgender students are significantly more likely to experience harassment and violence at school than their cisgender counterparts, at the hands of both peers and faculty.
- Conditioning private schools' tax-exempt status on the prohibition of discrimination based on gender identity will ensure a safer and more supportive academic environment for all students, regardless of gender identity.

THE POLICY IDEA

In order to guarantee transgender students a safer, more equitable academic environment, the language in the Massachusetts state regulation of private schools should be altered to grant tax-exempt status only to schools that commit to gender nondiscrimination. This commitment would include recognizing common-law name changes, maintaining student privacy, providing access to restrooms and changing facilities, and allowing for participation in appropriate sex-segregated classes. The updated language will state that no person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admissions or in obtaining advantages, privileges, and courses of study on account of gender identity (MDESE 2012).

POLICY ANALYSIS

By conditioning tax-exempt status on nondiscrimination, the state will be able to establish a universal standard of equality, allowing transgender students the freedom to choose public or private education without the threat of discriminatory school policies. Such a standard has already been established in public schools by the MDESE, which requires that all public schools establish policies, provide training, and implement practices to ensure that obstacles to equal access to school programs are removed for all students, including transgender and gender nonconforming students. The guidelines established by MDESE have decreased rates of physical, verbal, and sexual harassment of trans students in public schools, along with ensuring that all students are able to use appropriate facilities and acquire documentation with pronouns and gender markers that match their gender identity (USTS 2015).

Through the implementation of the language that currently applies to public schools, information about a student's assigned sex at birth, name change, or gender transition will be kept private and secure. All students will have access to restrooms, locker rooms and changing facilities that are sanitary and safe, which is essential, as 60 percent of transgender students have been denied access to appropriate restrooms and locker rooms (GLSEN 2014). Most importantly, whenever students are separated by gender in school activities or are subject to gender-specific policy, they must be permitted to participate in those activities and conform to policies that are consistent with their gender identity (MDESE 2011). In doing so, the state will guarantee that the rights of every transgender student are upheld. While those in opposition of this policy may argue that it interferes with religious freedom, there is a clear precedent in Massachusetts that does not allow for discrimination perpetrated by institutions that benefit financially from the state, either directly or indirectly, such as through property tax exemption. In the case of *Barrett v. Fontbonne Academy*, the Massachusetts Superior Court ruled that a Catholic secondary school was in violation of the state law against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender due to its withdrawal of an offer of employment upon learning that the candidate had a same-sex partner, demonstrating that discrimination is not excusable on the grounds of an institution's religious protections (Lavoie 2015). It is critical that religious schools are aware that no religious exemptions will be granted in this policy change.

NEXT STEPS

In order to alter this language, the MDESE will vote to invite public comment on the proposed amendment to the language regulating private school tax exemption, allowing organizations such as the Massachusetts Teachers Association, GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), and the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) to provide information regarding the impacts of this policy change (MDESE 2012). Afterwards, the MDESE will vote to approve the new regulation.

If approved, the MDESE will establish and disseminate a set of guidelines that will assist private schools in implementing the new gender identity provision. These guidelines will be created by the Office of Student and Family Support in partnership with organizations such as the MTPC and the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth. Local LGBTQ+ nonprofits, such as Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth (BAGLY), will be essential in establishing the language of guidelines. Input from the MDESE's Parent and Community Education and Involvement Advisory Council and the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students will ensure that guidelines are comprehensive and efficiently disseminated to Massachusetts private schools. Furthermore, a new Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Advisory Councils will be established, mirroring the Racial Imbalance Advisory Council but with a focus on nondiscrimination on the basis of gender identity.

KEY FACTS

- Of those who expressed a transgender identity or gender non-conformity while in grades K–12, 78 percent experienced harassment, 35 percent experienced physical assault, and 12 percent experienced sexual violence (Grant 2011).
- A national survey by GLSEN found that 75 percent of transgender youth feel unsafe at school, and 33 percent report hearing slurs aimed at transgender individuals (GLSEN 2014).
- Sixty percent of transgender students have been denied access to restrooms and locker rooms (UCLA 2017).

Laundry Machines in Schools: A Two-Pronged Approach to Improving Student Performance

By Em McPhie and Matthew Friedman

Roosevelt @ Washington University in St. Louis

THESIS

Missouri's Ferguson-Florissant School District should address its poor student performance and opportunity gap by providing parents with laundry facilities in exchange for classroom volunteering, thereby bolstering parental involvement in education, increasing student access to clean clothing, and improving mental health and attendance.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Just 17.2 percent of students in Missouri's Ferguson-Florissant School District are proficient in math, and only 29.6 percent are proficient in English (Bernhard 2019). All district students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (NCES 2018), and just 46.8 percent of graduates are college or career-ready, significantly below the state average of 71.2 percent (MO DESE 2019).

Recent district reforms have included a newsletter and added public meetings aimed at increasing parental involvement (Ferguson-Florissant School District 2018). These efforts are based on data: Parental involvement is the most accurate predictor of student achievement (National PTA 2000), boosting academic and social outcomes regardless of demographics (Henderson and Mapp 2002). However, the district's current solutions are insufficient. Since lower-income parents are more likely to hold multiple jobs and have less free time, parental involvement rates are lower for students in poverty than for their wealthier counterparts, contributing to the opportunity gap and facilitating absenteeism (Child Trends 2013). While 47 percent of parents above the federal poverty threshold reported volunteering in their child's school, just 27 percent of parents living below the poverty line did the same. There is also a racial disparity: Just 34 percent of Black parents reported volunteering in their child's school, compared to 49 percent of white parents (McQuiggan, Megra, and Grady 2017). Thus, low-income students and students of color have disproportionately low access to the benefits of parental involvement in the classroom.

THE POLICY IDEA

The Ferguson-Florissant School District should install washers and dryers in its schools and create a system that enables parents to exchange volunteer hours for free access to laundry services. These laundry services would also help combat one of the leading causes of student absenteeism: a lack of clean clothes. An increase in parent volunteering will improve classrooms' adult-to-student ratio, facilitating individual and group learning, fostering interactions between peers, and directly engaging students (UCLA 2013). Coupled with the increased access to clean clothes, this additional volunteering would advance student performance.

TALKING POINTS

- Parental involvement is a key predictor of student academic and social success (Henderson and Mapp 2002).
- Current parental involvement measures in the district are insufficient; they do not encourage active collaboration between parents, their children, and their schools.
- Implementing a free laundry services system in Ferguson-Florissant high schools will facilitate parental involvement in the schools and their children's academic lives, raising proficiency rates and helping to create a more holistic academic environment.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Developing an incentivization system for classroom volunteering will combat low parental involvement. For working parents, economic opportunity cost is a major roadblock to volunteering, disproportionately impacting minority students. Free laundry services would enable these parents to volunteer while simultaneously completing a necessary task. This policy would also measurably improve student attendance; having clean clothes makes children feel more comfortable attending school, reduces the probability of low self-esteem and bullying, and improves mental health outcomes (Rueb 2019).

The Jennings, Missouri, school district implemented a similar policy in 2012, alongside additional district reforms. Within three years, PTA meeting attendance increased (National Public Radio 2016), and district performance scores improved by over 15 percent. The demographics and performance statistics for the Jennings district mirrored Ferguson-Florissant prior to policy execution, suggesting that similar initiatives would be successful (St. Louis Post-Dispatch 2019). Additionally, a program that put laundry machines in St. Louis public schools led to increased student attendance, motivation, and participation (Kirk 2016).

This policy will require schools to invest in washers and dryers, which cost roughly \$800 (STL Appliance Outlet 2020). Providing one laundry machine per 250 students would cost the district roughly \$35,200. This student-to-machine ratio could easily be scaled as participation increases.

Other costs include increased utility bills, annual maintenance, and detergent. Local grants and the Whirlpool Care Counts program, which subsidizes school laundry machines, could mitigate these costs, and the upkeep expenditures could eventually be folded into a holistic budgeting approach to district education overall.

NEXT STEPS

In applying for grants and re-budgeting for the implementation of this policy, the district should consult with the Jennings, Missouri, school district and former superintendent Tiffany Anderson, who spearheaded a similar program. Anderson can provide logistical and financial advice, as well as suggestions for other parental involvement programs to complement this initiative.

The district should also coordinate with local PTAs. Communication and collaboration—for example, a committee of parents and teachers devoted to increasing family involvement in the district—will incorporate community input. Many of the parents who could potentially benefit from this policy must work during school hours, so reaching out to them will be essential to find alternative times and opportunities to volunteer, such as chaperoning after-school events or helping teachers with classroom tasks before or after school. Furthermore, the district should take students' input into consideration, asking how they would like to see parents involved in the classroom.

KEY FACTS

- Just 17.2 percent of students in Missouri's Ferguson-Florissant school district are proficient in math; 29.6 percent are proficient in English (Bernhard 2019).
- Only 46.8 percent of graduates from the Ferguson-Florissant school district are college- or career-ready, lagging behind the state average of 71.2 percent (MO Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2019).
- Introducing washing machines to a public school in Kansas City helped increase the percentage of students meeting attendance benchmarks from 46 percent to 84 percent (Rueb 2019).

Eviction Representation: Leveling the Legal Playing Field

By Gregory Miller and Genevieve Redsten
Roosevelt @ Notre Dame

THESIS

In order to alleviate staggeringly high eviction rates, the city of South Bend, Indiana, should provide a right to counsel (RTC) in eviction cases, providing tenants with equal footing in court against predatory landlords.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Tenants in South Bend lack proper legal representation, which heightens eviction rates, favors predatory landlords, and hinders justice. South Bend's eviction rate of 6.71 percent is 4.37 times higher than the national average, ranking among the worst 20 cities for eviction rates (Eviction Lab 2019). Landlords face little meaningful resistance to eviction filings: While 90 percent of landlords have representation in court (Pew 2019), 90 percent of tenants do not (Desmond 2015). Uneven representation erodes justice dramatically; the American Bar Association has advocated for a civil RTC to mitigate the discrepancy in representation (Dana 2006). Indiana's laissez-faire approach to landlord-tenant laws (Indiana 2019) has historically privileged the state's landlords, granting them nearly free range to dismiss tenants and gentrify neighborhoods—as evidenced by the recent mass evictions of Western Manor Apartments, a largely African American complex (Parott 2019).

Eviction laws affect all tenants, and disproportionately harm low-income, Black women (Desmond 2015), who experience the worst stigma post-eviction when applying for a new home (Park 2018). Black and Latinx individuals are twice as likely to rent their homes (Cliffullo et al. 2017). Indeed, Matthew Desmond finds that Black women are evicted at rates three times their population share (Desmond 2016).

Eviction impairs mental health (Collinson and Reed 2018), decreases earnings (Mok 2019), and increases the probability of prolonged homelessness (Crane and Warnes 2000)—effects which are all amplified by South Bend's shortage of affordable housing (Gardner 2018). The confluence of these impacts leaves victims hopeless as they fall into a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle (Desmond 2016).

TALKING POINTS

- Asymmetry in legal representation empowers landlords to secure speedy evictions while tenants cannot access proper legal defense resources; a right to counsel provides symmetry.
- Frequently, landlords are in violation of Indiana landlord-tenant regulations (e.g., improper supply of utilities in the house), but tenants are either unaware of these rights or lack the proper legal support to argue these violations in court.
- Equal access to justice can only occur after equal access to representation.

KEY FACTS

- South Bend's eviction rate is over four times the national average.
- Minneapolis saved over \$200,000 on emergency shelters alone after implementing RTC.
- Tenants represented by attorneys are 4.4 times less likely to be evicted.
- In New York City, areas with a right to counsel for eviction saw evictions decline five times faster than areas that did not have a right to counsel; evictions overall decreased 18 percent after implementation of a right to counsel.

THE POLICY IDEA

South Bend should provide all tenants facing eviction with the right to counsel. This policy would cost the city roughly \$200,000 per year (two attorneys at a market-standard \$90,000 salary, plus other costs), which would be a minor expense in South Bend's \$358 million annual budget. The saved expenditures from eviction-caused homelessness would offset these expenses. Eventually, the RTC policy should be expanded to St. Joseph County and the state of Indiana, both of which have their own high eviction rates.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Eviction representation combats predatory landlords in two distinct ways: courtroom success and deterrent effects.

In the courtroom, represented tenants are 4.4 times more likely to retain possession of their apartments (Sandefur 2010). When New York City enacted a limited-scope RTC for evictions in 2017 (Capps 2017), evictions overall decreased by 18 percent (Navarro 2016), and they declined over five times faster in RTC zip codes (Oksana 2019).

RTC also deters predatory landlords from filing evictions without just cause. In NYC, filings for evictions and issued warrants decreased by 6 percent in the span of one year after the implementation of RTC (Mironova 2019). By preventing landlords from even filing eviction cases, RTC would spare tenants from the legal consequences of an eviction court record. An eviction filing remains on a tenant's record indefinitely, hindering their ability to move (Sandefur 2010).

Evictions disproportionately impact marginalized communities; legal protections help level disparate conditions and promote the well-being of marginalized children. Evicted families often must move to lower-income neighborhoods where they experience more financial strain (Ding 2016). Children in lower-income neighborhoods perform worse in school and earn less money in adulthood than their peers (Ding and Huang 2016).

South Bend's common council could potentially resist an RTC due to its costs, yet such hesitation would be unfounded. The cost of a lawyer, \$200,000 per year, would have a minimal impact on the city's annual budget of \$358 million (Parott 2018); with around 1,100 evictions occurring per year in South Bend (Eviction Lab n.d.), the cost would be offset by decreased use of homeless shelters and emergency rooms. Minneapolis, for instance, saw \$220,000 in savings from homeless shelters alone (Grundman and Kruger 2018).

NEXT STEPS

The policy should be adopted by the common council and approved by the mayor's office; the South Bend Legal Department should handle execution.

To get this bill passed, local non-profits will need to endorse the bill to send a signal to the common council; such organizations would include Near Northwest Neighborhood, Rebuilding Together, South Bend Heritage Foundation, and the South Bend Tenant Association.

The common council will be open to this policy. Last year, they passed RSVP, which increases code enforcement and signals their commitment to fair housing. Two council members serve on the board of the South Bend Tenant Association, and another council member has attended a couple of the meetings. James Mueller, the new mayor, campaigned on increasing fair and affordable housing in South Bend and made an eviction defense fund part of his platform.

The policy will automatically apply to all, so marginalized communities will be guaranteed legal representation; in order to spread awareness of the policy, the South Bend Tenant Association will engage its members.

Alleviating Poverty Traps for Job Seekers with Subprime Credit: Banning Credit Checks in Employment Decisions in New York State

By Jennifer Zhang and Geena García
Roosevelt @ Columbia University

THESIS

The New York State Legislature should prohibit the consideration of credit scores in hiring decisions, as such use of credit checks results in disparate impact upon people of color and low-income backgrounds.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Credit scores allegedly assess an individual's financial responsibility and are largely calculated by private companies, including FICO, Experian, Equifax, and Transunion (DePersio 2019). The FICO score is widely considered the industry standard for credit scores, ranging from 300 to 850, with scores below 620 considered "subprime" (Hayes 2019). While the exact score formula is not publicly known, FICO considers five major criteria with varying weight: payment history, amount owed, length of credit history, new credit lines, and type of credit used (Chad 2019).

Employers widely use credit scores in making employment and promotion decisions: 60 percent of human resource representatives have reported that their companies checked job candidates' credit reports (Corbae and Glover 2018). A 2014 Demos study found that 1 in 10 unemployed Americans were informed that they would not be hired because of information in their credit reports (Traub 2014). However, credit scores are poor indicators of financial responsibility (Traub 2014). More than half of collections tradelines (credit, debt, loans, etc.) that appear on credit reports are medical debts, which are necessary expenditures that do not indicate the financial responsibility of the consumer (CFPB 2014).

Credit scores vary widely by race and are often inaccurate, with score disparities falling along lines consistent with historical discrimination. Only 66 percent of Black Americans report having a credit score of 620 or above, compared with 85 percent of white Americans (Ruetschlin and Asante-Muhammad 2013). In 2013, the Federal Trade Commission found 1 in 5 credit reports contained errors and 1 in 4 consumers had errors that could affect their credit scores (FTC 2013). Furthermore, such errors are more common for consumers of color: 40 percent of Black Americans report having credit report errors, compared to only 7 percent of white Americans (Ruetschlin and Asante-Muhammad 2013).

The use of credit reports in hiring decisions disparately impacts the employment prospects of people of color (Copeland and Schnake 2016). While employers might say low credit scores indicate potential hiring risks, credit status is not a statistically significant predictor of worker productivity (Weaver 2015). Thus, while using credit checks in hiring decisions is not facially discriminatory, it results in adverse employment outcomes for historically marginalized groups.

TALKING POINTS

- Because Black and Latinx people are more likely to have poor credit, the use of credit history in employment decisions necessarily discriminates against these groups, violating Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (NCLC 2016).
- Excepting jobs in which prudent financial judgment is categorically necessary for the fulfillment of duty, an applicant's financial history is not an indicator of their judgment skills at large or a predictor of their job performance.
- The time and resources needed to correct credit report inaccuracies are often beyond the means of unemployed and low-income people who are more likely to have credit report inaccuracies, most disadvantaged by credit checks, and most urgently dependent upon employment.

THE POLICY IDEA

To eliminate disparate impact and foster equal access to employment opportunities, the New York State Legislature should ban employers from considering credit scores in hiring decisions for jobs that do not categorically require prudent financial judgment. Exceptions should be narrowly tailored and made only for positions that involve controlling a large amount of financial assets and/or nonclerical exposure to trade secrets.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Upon losing employment or experiencing a major financial setback (such as unexpected medical fees), an individual is unable to pay for their expenses, resulting in a lower credit score (Leary 2019). People who report difficulty meeting their expenses are three times more likely to have subprime credit (Friedberg, Hynes, and Pattison 2017). Their lower credit score leaves them unable to find a job, forcing them to borrow more, which lowers their credit score even further; the result is a spiral of credit score depreciation and debt accrual (Corbae and Glover 2018). Credit report bans close this “poverty trap” that low-income people and people of color often face when they become unemployed (Corbae and Glover 2017). Such bans also increase the likelihood that unemployed individuals who recently experienced financial trouble will find a job by 25 percent (Friedberg, Hynes, and Pattison 2017). In net, this benefits society by lowering low-credit job seekers’ dependence on state welfare systems and decreasing the risk that they will go bankrupt (Friedberg, Hynes, and Pattison 2017).

Some studies purport that a credit score ban would hurt prospective employees by reducing overall job vacancies (Van Doren 2019; Cortes, Glover, and Tasci 2018). Other researchers have found that while credit report bans improve high-wage and government employment prospects for people in the lowest credit score range, moderate- to low-scoring consumers were worse off when employers substituted checks with other indicators such as job experience and education (Clifford and Shoag n.d.).

However, these studies are based on either limited datasets covering the short-term effects of credit bans, as most have only been in place for a few years, or, crucially, economic models that assume credit scores correlate to worker productivity (Friedberg, Hynes, and Pattison 2017). While the research demonstrates a possible cost to implementing credit report bans, the question policymakers should consider is whether the moral and economic benefits are worth these short-term impacts.

At the national level, members of Congress have shown support for increasing restrictions on credit agencies and the role of credit reports in access to goods and employment opportunities (Murphy 2017; US Congress 2019). Ten states and four cities—including New York City—have implemented such policies, affirming the net positive benefits of credit check bans (Devata, Syzba, and Blecher 2018).

NEXT STEPS

Since the 2017–2018 legislative session, the New York State Assembly and Senate have been considering Assembly Bill A2611E and Senate Bill S2884E, respectively, which would ban employers in New York State from considering credit history in hiring, employment, and licensing decisions (Sanders Jr. 2020). The most efficient route to implementation would be for each chamber to pass and send their respective bills to Governor Andrew Cuomo, who has expressed support for the policy (US News 2019). Grassroots advocacy from constituents contacting their state legislative representatives could help speed up the passage of these bills. Although there is some promise in the possibility of federal action, the uncertainty makes it imperative for progressive states like New York to act.

KEY FACTS

- In a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, 60 percent of human resource representatives reported that their companies performed credit checks on job candidates (Corbae and Glover 2018).
- 1 in 10 people in low- to medium-income households have been denied a job because of poor credit (Traub and McElwee 2016).
- In 2013, the Federal Trade Commission found that 1 in 5 credit reports contained errors and 1 in 4 consumers had errors that could affect their credit scores (FTC 2013). Furthermore, such errors are more common for consumers of color: 40 percent of Black Americans report having credit report errors, compared to only 7 percent of white Americans (Ruetschlin and Asante-Muhammad 2013).

Name Changes in Iowa: How to Make Transgender Identities More Fiscally Attainable

By Laura Widman and Emily Miranda

Roosevelt @ University of Iowa

THESIS

In order to allow transgender Iowans to more easily legally transition, the state of Iowa should abolish its current pricing structure and adopt a universal fee of \$35 for all name changes.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

In the state of Iowa, the policy to change one's name is divided into three categories: marriage, divorce, and other cases (Iowa Legislature 2018). In the case of marriage, an individual must pay a \$35 fee and provide a copy of their marriage license. In the case of divorce, a person can revert to a name given at birth or a name taken as part of a former marriage at no extra cost. For any other reason, there is a \$185 fee, and the person must petition the court. The petitioner is also required to attach a birth certificate to the petition, often prompting an additional \$20 fee for reissuance. There is also a \$20 fee for an official document reflecting the name change and a \$20 fee for a new birth certificate (Sandler et al. 2019). Beyond this, there are fees for reissuing a new driver's license, Social Security card, passport, and other legal documents that can quickly amount to over \$1,000. This discrepancy disproportionately affects transgender Iowans, who often change their names to more closely match their gender identity. Names are often a gendered feature, and an individual changing their name to better reflect their gender identity is an important aspect of transitioning that is beneficial to a trans individual's mental health and safety in social settings. Transgender Americans are one of the most economically disenfranchised minority groups in the United States and are over four times more likely to be living in extreme poverty than the average American (Grant et al. 2011). To place the cost of name-changing out of reach for many people who seek such a change is both unfair and discriminatory.

TALKING POINTS

- Not being able to legally change their name can put transgender Iowans in positions of vulnerability and harm: 40 percent of respondents to "Injustice at Every Turn" reported being harassed when they presented an ID that did not match their gender identity/expression (Grant et al. 2011)
- The fees for changing one's name on legal documents, as well as on passports, Social Security cards, and driver's licenses, can quickly amount to over \$1,000.
- This policy will also benefit victims of domestic abuse who seek to change their name to distance themselves from their abuser for safety or mental health reasons (Driskell 2009).

KEY FACTS

- In the past year, 31 percent of transgender people in rural communities have had negative experiences when showing IDs that do not match their gender identity (Movement Advancement Project 2019).
- Some 78 percent of respondents to "Injustice at Every Turn" reported feeling more comfortable at work—with improved performance—after transitioning, even though incidents of reported harassment did not change (Grant et al. 2011).
- 81 percent of US Transgender Survey respondents in Iowa reported that none of their IDs had the name and gender they preferred, the main reason being the high cost of having them changed (National Center for Transgender Equality 2015).

THE POLICY IDEA

The state of Iowa should amend its current policy regarding officially changing one's legal name and lower the fee from \$185 to a universal fee of \$35. Lowering this fee would make the process of changing one's name far more financially accessible. This would make transitioning for transgender Iowans, as well as recovery for domestic violence survivors, simpler and safer.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Even without barriers to changing their names, transgender individuals in Iowa are already economically and socially disenfranchised. Other fees for civil cases are much closer to \$35, and in some cases, such as for a final decree of dissolution of marriage, the fee is donated to charity (Iowa Legislature 2017). Those in favor of keeping fees high argue that it serves as a barrier to fraudulent activity, such as evading the law, taxes, and debt collectors, although this justification does not hold up to scrutiny (ACLU 2015). Name changes create a paper trail that can be traced through the legal system, which would not benefit potential abusers of the policy change. While there is no reliable way to analyze the proportion of trans Iowans who legally change their name in order to match their gender identity, these data are not required to understand the impact of the financial barrier on the trans community. The benefits of reducing the mere cost of a name change extends beyond economic equality; it has been shown that the ability of transgender individuals to change their name increases their quality of life exponentially. Providing resources that aid in transition, such as the ability to change one's name, improves mental health and performance at work for these individuals and also decreases depression and anxiety to levels more consistent with peers who are cisgender (Durwood, McLaughlin, and Olson 2016). The benefits of a lower fee for trans Iowans, as well as for individuals looking to change their names to overcome a past of domestic abuse, outweigh the arguments in favor of the fee. While this change would not alleviate all costs associated with changing one's name, we believe this is an important starting point and hope to see similar changes nationally.

NEXT STEPS

In order to reduce the fee for people seeking to change their names on Iowa-issued identification, we must have support from the Iowa judicial branch. We plan to reach out to our local representative: Zach Wahls—who has gained recognition for his defense of LGBTQ+ rights—to introduce the bill. A statewide coalition among various LGBTQ+ organizations would help lobbying efforts. The University of Iowa College of Law is a likely ally, having already produced a policy guide to help educate transgender individuals on how to change their identification. In addition, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission is tasked with recommending legislation concerning gender identity discrimination to the state legislature (Sandler et al. 2016). Next, we will consult mental health professionals in order to explain the health benefits for transgender individuals of changing their name. Finally, we will reach out to domestic violence crisis workers to explain the urgency of making name changes more accessible for victims of domestic violence.

Backing Asylum Seekers: Expanding DOJ Accreditation at North Texas Law Institutions

By Ted Shi, Pratik Koppikar, Vivian Tran, Varun Venkat, Taylor Crockett, and Cady Baltz
Roosevelt @ The University of Texas at Dallas

THESIS

To combat the lack of accessible legal resources available to asylum applicants, North Texas university law programs should apply for accreditation through the Department of Justice (DOJ), allowing law students to represent asylum seekers in immigration court.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Although the number of asylum applications has risen, Texas immigration courts fail to provide a sanctuary for those escaping dangerous conditions in Latin America. Asylum applications from the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have increased 800 percent from 2012 to 2017, coinciding with a dramatic uptick in gang violence (Mossaad 2019). Yet, only 20 percent of asylum requests have been granted from the Northern Triangle. In recent years, the courts have tightened the legal process, suggesting that most asylum requests are “meritless” (Roig-Franzia 2019). However, the merit of an asylum case is often based on slight inconsistencies or minute legal details that make winning a case a “difficult, time-consuming task” (Roig-Franzia 2019).

The enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) in 1952 placed the burden of proof on applicants to provide a “credible testimony” for meeting the standards of being a refugee in Section 208 of the INA (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952). After the September 11 attacks, anti-immigrant policymakers utilized the ambiguity of Section 208 of the INA to deny applications by citing a lack of credible testimony (Kerwin 2011). In response to this lack of government support, a network of charities has emerged along the southern border, attempting to provide legal services and assistance to asylum seekers as they navigate the application process (Del Real and Fernandez 2019). Given the shortage of available legal resources, the growing violence in parts of Latin America, and the recent increase in asylum denials under the Trump administration, immediate action addressing asylum immigration policy is imperative.

At the federal level, policies such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) (DHS 2019) and the interim final rule (49 CFR § 106.35, 2006) have significantly stymied asylum relief. Current federal policy directly harms individuals who already experience the worst of conditions; given the rising violence in areas such as the Northern Triangle, local asylum policy must become a priority to effectively use the nation’s federal structure as a tool to combat structural injustice.

TALKING POINTS

- Refugees seeking asylum are fleeing to the United States in increasing numbers due to increased violence, but the immigration system is incredibly difficult to navigate.
- Access to legal representation is a crucial resource for any individual seeking asylum in the US.
- The Department of Justice allows for accreditation of non-law practitioners so that they may assist in asylum cases, yet this opportunity remains relatively underutilized (8 C.F.R. § 1292, 2009).
- Though none in Texas have yet done so, schools of law can seek accreditation to allow their students to engage in asylum cases, providing valuable legal experience for students and benefits for those seeking asylum.

THE POLICY IDEA

8 C.F.R. § 1292.1(a)(4) is a federal regulation managed by the Department of Justice that allows a non-attorney “accredited representative” to represent individuals seeking asylum (8 C.F.R. § 1292, 2009). North Texas academic law institutions should enact a binding policy to create programs for students to receive accreditation or partial accreditation, allowing students to legally represent asylum seekers in immigration court and aid individuals in the process of filing a case. Through this network of legal assistance, the lack of representation in asylum cases would be dramatically mitigated.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Expanding legal representation would considerably increase the chances for applicants to be approved for asylum. The approval rate for unrepresented individuals in FY 2017 was 10.0 percent, yet represented individuals were approved 45.6 percent of the time (TRAC 2017).

Historically, denial rates in Texas have been some of the highest in the nation and thus warrant the most attention. Between 2013 and 2018, Dallas judges denied up to 94.4 percent of applications (TRAC 2018). In Houston, 9 of 10 immigration court judges denied at least 80 percent of applicants (Trovall 2018). The national denial rate was substantially lower, peaking at 65.0 percent in 2018 (TRAC 2018). The current political culture in Texas is in opposition to increased immigration from the southern border, and Governor Greg Abbott recently declared that Texas will attempt to halt future asylum seekers (Garrett and Solis 2020). Nonetheless, the long-term viability of his approach is doubtful, and refugee admission should remain a highly contested issue both in court and in policy.

KEY FACTS

- In the past five years, asylum denials have increased 193 percent (DOJ 2019).
- In 2018, the Dallas Immigration Court processed 784 asylum claims (DOJ 2019). However, from 2013–2018, Dallas Immigration Court judges denied up to 94.4 percent of cases (TRAC 2018).
- Dallas currently has only seven accredited organizations and 40 representatives (DOJ 2019).
- Asylum seekers without legal representation were almost five times less likely to win in immigration court than those with representation (TRAC 2017).

North Texas is home to critical stakeholders such as the Human Rights Initiative, International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Catholic Charities of Dallas, which all provide direct relief for asylum seekers; the IRC, for example, is contracted with the city of Dallas to represent detainees in deportation hearings (Solis 2020). Our policy seeks to build upon this momentum by mobilizing academic institutions in the area to work toward these same efforts, ideally in collaboration with these organizations.

In accreditation, law schools have the unique opportunity to give their students self-driven court experience. Recruiting any number of accredited student representatives to the desperate cause of asylum seekers would make significant headways, but it would also cost resources from local law schools. It remains to be seen if institutions are willing to spend the resources to earn accreditation, train students in immigration law specifics, and continue the program. Furthermore, immigration law is an inherently political subject that many schools may be unwilling to broach with respect to safer, cheaper endeavors.

NEXT STEPS

Our plan for policy implementation first involves working with accredited institutions and individuals to understand the necessary requirements for a successful application for accreditation. We have already met with Betsy Jenson of Elon University School of Law to discuss restrictions and conservative resistance for student accreditation.

From here, we will interface with faculty at Texas A&M University School of Law Legal Clinic, SMU Dedman School of Law Family Immigration Detention Clinic, and University of North Texas Dallas College of Law to discuss school-specific barriers to student accreditation. We will assess their current aid structure to asylum seekers by reviewing past cases and determine whether sufficient legal assistance is being provided. On target campuses without sufficient aid, we'll provide resources to gain accreditation by connecting them with campuses that have already been through the process. Finally, after campus accreditation has been approved, we'll continue our engagement with clinics experiencing deficiencies to develop individualized institutional policies that create a pathway to accreditation for students.

UGACounts: Accurately Enumerating the University of Georgia Student Population for the 2020 Census

By Christopher Rosselot, Shashank Ganeshan, Priyanka Parikh, Sophie Murtey,
and Marshall Berton

Roosevelt @ University of Georgia

THESIS

University of Georgia (UGA) students have been significantly undercounted in the US Census, resulting in reduced access to resources for Athens-Clarke County (ACC). To prevent an undercount in 2020, ACC should establish a postsecondary education subcommittee to support enumeration efforts.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

As the 2020 Census approaches, accurate counting is crucial for ACC to allocate the funding required to serve its community for the next decade. However, those below the age of 30 constitute 44 percent of nonparticipants nationwide (Pew Research Center 2010). UGA students represent approximately 25 percent of the ACC population. Unfortunately, ambiguity in defining “usual residence” leads many students to assume that they should be counted in their parents’ county (Athens-Clarke County 2020; Cohn 2014; America Counts Staff 2020). However, students should be counted where they live most of the year: their college town. Despite low student response rates, no targeted efforts exist in ACC to combat undercounting among postsecondary students (US Census Bureau 2020; Morris 2019).

Accurate counts ensure that ACC receives federal funding to support infrastructure, education, affordable housing, employment, and health care that benefit county residents and the UGA community (United States Census). Census data also determine political redistricting and influence where businesses choose to expand (CBPP 2018). In ACC, 34.4 percent of people live in poverty, and 14.7 percent of the homeless population are chronically homeless; these groups depend significantly on government-funded resources (United States Census Bureau; Cline 2016). Per one estimate, the 2010 Census undercounted 10,000 ACC residents, which reduced funding by about \$16 million (Johnson 2019). Thus, undercounting residents deprives ACC, particularly marginalized communities, of necessary public funding.

TALKING POINTS

- As the counting period approaches (March–July), accurate counts will allow ACC to receive additional federal funding to support public programs, draw fairer districts, and attract businesses (US Census Bureau 2019).
- UGA students represent approximately 25 percent of ACC’s population, and of those who fail to complete the census, 32 percent have no awareness of it (Pew Research Center 2010).
- Increasing postsecondary student census participation will help ACC fund initiatives that combat poverty, such as the Affordable Housing Fund, Prosperity Package, and Workforce Investment Program—projects that ACC flagged as future budgetary issues.

THE POLICY IDEA

The ACC Unified Government should establish a Complete Count postsecondary education subcommittee (“UGACounts”) focused on accurately counting postsecondary students in the 2020 census. This subcommittee will unify disparate stakeholders through an education, promotion, and enumeration campaign. Accurate counting will help equip ACC with federal funding to grow community projects designed to reduce poverty, improve education, expand health care programs, and bolster local infrastructure.

POLICY ANALYSIS

The Census Bureau delegates the enumeration of specific populations to local Complete Count Committees (CCC), who, in turn, create subcommittees targeting specific populations. In its current form, the Education Committee targets K–12 students, their families, school employees, postsecondary students, and university employees. Since college students are an inherently different population from K–12 students, a postsecondary-specific subcommittee is necessary.

A student-led subcommittee allows students to leverage informal channels of communication in ways unavailable to external actors. At the same time, operating within the larger CCC is crucial for the subcommittee's success. Access to marketing materials, census expertise, and cross-sector "best practices" would not be readily available otherwise. In addition, major student groups, including student-run activism organizations, such as UGA Votes, can leverage existing networks to secure student civic participation, and have agreed to collaborate. Since the Census Bureau conducts education campaigns targeting undercounted populations, coordinating a unified effort among stakeholders is feasible.

The cost of inaction is a lack of targeted information and enumeration to students currently living in ACC, resulting in confusion and misinformation. Current CCC oversight is minimal, so without an intentional student-led effort, the likelihood of undercounting the hardest-to-reach students (those living off-campus) increases. Similar to the events following the 2010 census, ACC could experience a decline in funding for key federal programs such as the Pell Grant and Medicaid, which would harm college students and ACC constituents in need for the next 10 years.

NEXT STEPS

Accurate enumeration requires grassroots support and a diverse coalition with representation from UGA administration, students, and service workers. The establishment of a postsecondary education subcommittee will connect key stakeholders, through frequent meetings and collaborative efforts.

We will work with administrators including Alison McCullick, Director of UGA Community Relations, as well as major campus organizations such as Student Government Association. In partnership with these groups, the postsecondary education subcommittee will conduct tabling events in the Tate Student Center, lead a university-wide social media campaign, and host informational sessions to encourage census completion and educate students.

Furthermore, the subcommittee will research past inefficiencies in counting UGA students with the local Complete Count Committee. For students living off-campus, we will work with Greek councils to encourage fraternity and sorority participation and local leaders, such as Athens Mayor Kelly Girtz, to encourage apartment owners to set up informational tables and bulletins.

KEY FACTS

- In 2010, Georgia earned \$1,639.10 per person counted in the 2010 census (US Census Bureau).
- Athens-Clarke County has a poverty rate of 34.4 percent—one of the highest in the country (US Census Bureau 2018).
- Approximately 19,543 UGA students, 66 percent, live in off-campus housing, primarily in nonfamily groups (U.S. News & World Report).
- In 2017, ACC received \$1,187,911 from the Community Development Block Grant as a result of census reports. The funding helped improve economic mobility in areas of financial decline (US Census in Georgia).

MWind: Renewing Rural Michigan Communities' Economic Future through Wind Farm Development

By Morgan Showen, Paige Hodder, David Kinane, and Emma Uebelhor

Roosevelt @ University of Michigan

THESIS

Challenges facing the agricultural industry throughout Michigan have caused economic losses in rural counties. To counteract these hardships and make the state a renewable energy leader, Michigan should create wind energy incentive zones to encourage wind turbine development within these struggling communities.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The Michigan agricultural industry has been in decline for decades as a result of increased automation and increased reliance on corporate-run farms (Paquette 2019). In addition, the industry has been recently damaged by changing trade and domestic farming policies, shifting consumer demands, and increasingly volatile weather, resulting in higher levels of unemployment in several counties (Barrett 2019; BLS 2019). Between 2012 and 2019, over 5,000 farms in Michigan closed, and from 2010 to 2015, the industry lost around 119,000 jobs (Keene 2019; Knudson 2018). With the average age of Michigan farmers increasing by eight years on average from 1982 to 2012, more farmers than ever before will be retiring in the next decade, leaving their farmland behind (CMF 2016). Coupled with a decline in the tradition of passing on farms from parent to child, the pressure is rising for Michigan to find people to continue working the farmland that contributes to nearly a quarter of the state's gross domestic product (CMF 2016).

Concurrently, residents in urban areas across the state suffer from increasing levels of air pollution as a result of fossil fuel use (Shaffer 2017). Increased air pollution has impacted communities of color disproportionately and can lead to issues such as asthma, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, adverse birth outcomes, and missed work or school (Shaffer 2017).

The combination of these problems has resulted in a need for Michigan to find ways to decrease air pollution and to support its agricultural industry.

TALKING POINTS

- Due to factors outside of their control, such as increased inclement weather and ongoing trade wars, farmers in Michigan have been struggling with low income and high unemployment.
- Residents of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs are plagued by high concentrations of carbon emissions that disproportionately impact the public health and economic well-being of people of color.
- To help farmers in rural areas bolster their wages and Detroit residents breathe cleaner air, Michigan must prioritize the development of wind energy on farmland.

KEY FACTS

- Farmers who lease their land to wind energy companies are investing, on average, twice as much money into their land per year, and are more likely to continue to farm and pass on their land to children (Mills 2015).
- Employment of wind turbine technicians, the fifth highest paying job without a college degree, is expected to double by 2026 (US News & World Report 2019).
- Air pollution from nonrenewable energy sources in and around Detroit causes 690 deaths, 1,800 hospitalizations, hundreds of thousands of missed workdays, and \$7 billion of lost economic production per year (U-M 2019).

THE POLICY IDEA

To harness the potential for wind energy throughout the state, Michigan should implement our program, entitled MWind, to connect farmers with energy companies looking to invest in wind power development. MWind would target economically vulnerable rural areas that would most benefit from wind development, as determined by unemployment rates, available land, and wind energy source potential. Offering tax incentives based on long-term commitment and levels of energy production, the program will simultaneously establish Michigan as a renewable energy leader and promote economic development throughout the state.

POLICY ANALYSIS

By leasing their land, farmers would boost their income by about \$4,000 to \$8,000 per turbine (Modern Agriculture 2017), buffering against poor crop yields or volatility in the market (Barrett 2019). In addition, wind turbines, unlike alternative energy sources, have a minimal impact on farmland, allowing farmers to continue producing on land that has been in their families for generations (Mills 2019). Together, these benefits would contribute to the preservation of small independent farming in Michigan. The program would also bring jobs to counties with higher rates of unemployment; one gigawatt of wind energy can support over 4,000 temporary jobs and 100 annual jobs (Dvorak 2016). We identified counties with abundant farmland (MTRI 2017) and high potential for wind energy production (WINDEXchange 2019) as opportunity zones; current unemployment rates in these counties range from 0.6–1.7 percent (BLS 2019) above the national level of 3.5 percent (National Conference of State Legislators 2019). Finally, recent studies suggest that just one 100 MW wind farm has the potential to eliminate the equivalent of more than 30,000 homes' carbon emissions (Nordman 2013). As a result, increased wind farm construction will promote improved air quality throughout the state.

Some individuals are concerned that wind turbines are aesthetically unpleasing, but on this level, the potential benefits outweigh the costs (Graham 2018). The largest opposition would likely be posed by fossil fuel companies. However, renewables are becoming increasingly popular, and many of these companies are already invested in renewable energy, including Michigan's primary energy provider, which recently set a goal of producing 100 percent carbon-neutral energy by 2050. Promoting wind energy in struggling communities throughout Michigan has the potential to improve the lives of people across the state.

NEXT STEPS

With the support of the state legislature, the MWind program has the potential to push Michigan toward renewable energy leadership and to reinvigorate rural economies throughout the state. To gain this support, we will build a diverse coalition of advocates, from farmers and rural community members involved in pro-wind organizations to members of Detroiters Working of Environmental Justice who are already fighting against the worst effects of pollution in the state. Additionally, we will pull in researchers like Dr. Sarah Mills, an expert on Michigan rural renewable energy policy, to contribute their expertise to enhance the program's credibility and to identify more opportunity zones. Ideally, this broad coalition will motivate legislators, from opportunity zones and from throughout the state, to implement the MWind program. Following implementation, the program, like the rest of Michigan's energy production, would be regulated by the Michigan Public Utilities Commission.

Lighting the Future: Implementing Rooftop Solar Panels in UNC Dorm Renovations

By Reilly Robinson, Gabriel Juedemann, and Alfredo Ellz

Roosevelt @ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

THESIS

To reduce the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill's (UNC) carbon emissions, most of which are generated by student energy use (Kupatt, Scandella, and Waters 2008), the UNC Senate should incorporate the addition of rooftop solar panels in plans to renovate student dormitories.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

In 2006, the town of Chapel Hill became the first American municipality to pledge a 60 percent decrease in carbon emissions by 2050. Despite this pledge, UNC-Chapel Hill uses fossil fuels for the vast majority of its energy needs, creating 489,524 metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2018 (UNC Three Zeros n.d.). This lack of clean energy stems considerably from North Carolina's energy laws, which only allow utility companies to charge for electricity. Although utility giant Duke Energy has heavily invested in large solar farms that then sell their energy to the monopoly, it has neglected small-scale solar projects such as rooftop panels, as they are not as profitable (Gearino 2018). However, local action to combat climate change is essential to inventory greenhouse gas emissions, set appropriate targets, create policy solutions, and implement cross-boundary policies (Tang et al. 2010).

Steps toward purifying our energy sources have the potential to benefit society as a whole, given that continued use of fossil fuels contributes to global warming and subsequent damage to the environment. In North Carolina, issues arising from climate change include rising sea levels, increased rates of catastrophic events, decreased water availability, and increases in both frequency and severity of extreme heat events (Devlin et al. 2014). As climate scientists insist on net-zero carbon emission by 2050 to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5° C, the switch to clean energy is imperative (IPCC 2018).

TALKING POINTS

- In order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 to keep the increase in global temperature below 1.5° C as recommended by climate scientists, we must transition to clean energy like solar power.
- Since the federal government has been slow to enact anti-carbon laws, smaller institutions such as universities must take the initiative to transition to cleaner energy.
- Installing solar panels to dorms upon renovation is a cost-efficient way to reduce our carbon footprint and can be replicated in the future by other schools and municipalities. Additionally, it is nonintrusive to the dorms as they will already be undergoing renovations.

KEY FACTS

- UNC-Chapel Hill produces about 340,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide annually, with most of it stemming from student energy consumption through lights and heating inside dorms (Kupatt, Scandella, and Waters 2008).
- The group RESPC was able to collect \$185,000 in student fees to fund solar panels for the Morrison dorm's 2004–2005 renovation (Kupatt, Scandella, and Waters 2008). This plan can be feasibly re-implemented in future dorm renovations.
- The University of California, Berkeley purchased rooftop solar panels significantly below market rate to supply 1 MW of energy per year, which has proved cost-effective within one year of implementation (Berkeley 2018).

THE POLICY IDEA

UNC has already proposed a new “Master Plan” to modernize residence halls in an innovative style (Needham 2019); adding solar panels to dorms as they are renovated would push Chapel Hill closer to its goal of reduced carbon emissions. Given that students use most of UNC’s power, purifying the energy sources used by dormitories would significantly reduce UNC greenhouse gas emissions. It would also curb the corporate power of utility companies, which currently account for 47 percent of UNC’s carbon emissions and profit considerably from the school’s continued use of fossil fuels (Kupatt, Scandella, and Waters 2008).

POLICY ANALYSIS

UNC has already proven that it is capable of installing solar panels during dorm renovation. When the Morrison dormitory underwent renovation between 2004–2005, the Renewable Energy Special Projects Committee (RESPC) of the UNC Senate collected around \$185,000 in student fees to purchase 172 panels; these funds came from the \$4 fee in student tuition set aside for renewable energy projects (Kupatt, Scandella, and Waters 2008). Unfortunately, poor panel placement and structural flaws limit the functionality of these panels.

However, rooftop solar panel installations can be effective if UNC replicates projects undertaken by other universities and municipalities. For example, the University of California, Berkeley purchased panels at 25 to 40 percent below the market rate to provide a total of 1 MW; estimates show the panels saved on energy costs within a year (Berkeley Sustainability 2018). In New York City, rooftop solar panels citywide will provide 100 MW, reduce emissions by 35,000 MtCO₂, and save \$8 million in annual energy costs (NYC 2020). Admittedly, rooftop solar panels are not sufficient to eliminate UNC’s dependence on fossil fuels (Goldfarb 2016); however, they are a cost-effective starting place signaling a dedication to green energy.

The utility companies that provide almost half of UNC’s energy are likely to be resistant to this policy. One argument they could pose is that not all buildings have the infrastructure to support the weight of solar panels, requiring traditional energy sources. However, sustainability fees have increased from \$4 to \$8 since the original establishment of the Morrison solar panels (UNC Cashier 2019), and this extra money would be used to bring such dorms up to code to support the panels.

NEXT STEPS

To promote the construction of rooftop solar panels, the sustainability fund raised from student fees should be utilized. The UNC Senate, and specifically RESPC, determines the usage of these funds, and thus we must lobby them directly. The RESPC is made up of seven voting members: five undergraduate students and two graduate students. The RESPC allocated \$185,000 to the Morrison Dorm Renovation (RESPC 2019), so we will lobby for the prompt creation of a fund dedicated to renovating modern dorms on campus—Horton and Koury Residence Halls, for example. In the long term, a fund dedicated to solar installations on future dormitories and renovations of older dorms as UNC’s “Master Plan” of dormitory renovation proceeds would be beneficial as well. It may be necessary to rally student support through town halls and petitions to pressure the RESPC to prioritize solar panels over other projects, and overall support from the student government may prove especially valuable.

Mandating Access to HIV Testing and Counseling in Fulton County High Schools

By Aditi Madhusudan

Roosevelt @ The University of Georgia

THESIS

To address factors leading to low rates of HIV testing and linkage to medical care among high school students, Fulton County should mandate access to free, confidential, rapid HIV testing and counseling services on-site in public high schools.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

In 2017, Georgia ranked fifth highest in the nation for its rate of new HIV diagnoses, and counties within metro Atlanta, such as Fulton and Dekalb, accounted for roughly two-thirds of Georgia residents diagnosed and living with HIV (DPH 2017); 4,423 youths aged 13–24 in Atlanta Eligible Metropolitan Area (EMA) were diagnosed with HIV from 2008 to 2012, and in 2011, it was reported that only half of youths in this area received medical care for HIV following their diagnosis (DPH 2019). Rates of HIV testing are low among high school students (CDC 2019a), and youths aged 13–24 in the Atlanta EMA are less likely to be linked to medical care or achieve viral suppression as compared to those aged 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, and those above 55 years of age (DPH 2019).

While Fulton County has attempted to address the HIV epidemic by instituting a department for HIV elimination (Saunders 2019a), launching the High Impact Prevention Program (HIPPP), and offering free or reduced-cost HIV testing through its board of health, it has failed to account for factors that may prevent youths from accessing HIV-related services. Youths aged 13–24 who are receiving medical care for HIV are more likely to come from low-income households than those in older age groups (CDC 2019a), possibly preventing these youths from accessing necessary transportation for health care access. The rate of testing and linkage to medical care may also be impacted by the stigma surrounding HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases within this age group (CDC 2019a). While Georgia law permits minors to consent to HIV testing and treatment without parental approval (DPH 2019), many of them receive health insurance through their guardians, triggering concerns about confidentiality among youths (Lezin et al. n.d.). 23 percent of Georgia residents diagnosed with HIV in 2017 developed AIDS within one year, which indicates a late diagnosis (DPH 2017). Lack of access to HIV testing and treatment could be detrimental to many students' health.

TALKING POINTS

- Due to factors such as stigma (CDC 2019a), low-income family backgrounds (CDC 2019a), and concerns about confidentiality (Lezin et al. n.d.), high school-aged youths may refrain from seeking HIV testing or treatment in a timely manner.

KEY FACTS

- Fulton County ranks sixth out of all counties in the United States for its rate of new HIV diagnoses, with the rate of new infections in the Atlanta area being double that of the state of Georgia as a whole (Fulton County Government n.d.).
- The CDC estimates that in 2016, only 56 percent of the approximately 50,900 youths aged 13–24 with HIV were aware of their infection (CDC 2019a).
- The NIH conducted a study on young school-aged Black and Hispanic men who have sex with men (YMSM), two populations who are disproportionately affected by HIV, and found that 34.4 percent would be more likely to get tested for HIV if they could do so at or in close proximity to a school (Morris et al. 2018).

- While there have been several initiatives enacted in recent years to address the HIV epidemic in Fulton County, they do not account for the obstacles youths disproportionately face when seeking out HIV testing and/or treatment.
- By serving as a medium for administering HIV testing and linkage to medical care, schools can contribute to improving health and educational outcomes for students (Lezin et al. n.d.).

POLICY IDEA

In order to reach at-risk youths who need access to HIV testing and treatment, Fulton County should enact a countywide policy that mandates that public high schools provide free, confidential, rapid HIV testing and counseling services on-site. School clinic staff should be trained to provide these services for students. HIV pretest and medically appropriate posttest counseling, which is standard for individuals being tested for HIV in the state of Georgia (DPH 2019), should focus on risk evaluation and linkage to external medical treatment for HIV-positive individuals or preventative care for high-risk, HIV-negative individuals.

POLICY ANALYSIS

In addition to funds that are appropriated at the county and state levels, Fulton County receives a significant amount of federal funding for local HIV-related initiatives through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (FCTFHA 2017). In 2017, the Fulton County Board of Health received almost \$6.9 million in federal funding to provide HIV care and prevention services (FCTFHA 2017).

Funding for this proposal could draw from Fulton County's CDC-funded HIPP, which is already working to expand access to free HIV testing in community settings and link individuals to medical care and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) (Fulton County Board of Health "High Impact"). Though the out-of-pocket cost of HIV treatment and PrEP is high (Walensky 2019), linking low-income or uninsured students to medical and preventative care would be feasible through the support of Fulton County's no-cost PrEP clinic (Cardwell-Alston 2018) and the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program. The estimated \$367,134 lifetime treatment cost for individuals with HIV (CDC 2019b) indicates that the prevention of even a single case of HIV saves thousands of dollars in the long run.

By providing HIV testing and counseling, Fulton County schools can work toward improving educational outcomes as students' health impacts concentration, attendance, and graduation rates (Lezin et al. n.d.). A study conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on young school-aged Black and Hispanic men who have sex with men (YMSM), two populations who are disproportionately affected by HIV, found that 34.4 percent would be more likely to get tested for HIV if they could do so at or in close proximity to a school (Morris et al. 2018). Therefore, implementing HIV testing and counseling services in schools would reach at-risk students who need them most.

The most challenging aspect of implementing this proposal is finding a comprehensive way to train school clinic staff to provide testing and counseling services. In the past, the Georgia AIDS Education and Training Center worked extensively with Georgia's Department of Health to expand training for HIV testing and counseling in Fulton County through the Train-the-Trainer program (FCTFHA 2017). The results of rapid HIV tests are generally available within the time frame of a few minutes to an hour, and administering them to students is convenient as they only involve the collection of blood through a finger stick or oral fluid (DPH 2019).

NEXT STEPS

Mandating access to HIV testing and counseling in Fulton County high schools would require the addition of a county policy and collaboration between the health and education departments. By working with these departments, it will be easier to garner the attention of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, the county's primary legislative body. In order to secure funding from HIPP, working with the Fulton County Board of Health and its coordinator, Dr. Sandra Elizabeth Ford, is necessary (Saunders 2019b). Additionally, the Fulton County Board of Education holds significant legislative power as it petitions the county's legislative delegation, enacts policies, and appropriates funds for school programs (Fulton County Schools "Fulton" n.d.). Specifically, the department for Student Health Services (SHS) develops policies related to school health procedures and oversees school-based clinics and screenings (Fulton County Schools "Student"). Reaching out to the coordinator of SHS, Mrs. Lynne Meadows, will be crucial when establishing HIV training protocols for school clinic staff. Lastly, gaining the support of parents from parent-teacher associations within high schools would assist in influencing school officials.

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