

UTAH HOUSE
DEMOCRATS

2024

**LEGISLATIVE
PRIORITIES**





Dear Fellow Utahns,

As we start the 2024 Legislative Session, I am honored to lead the Utah House Democratic Caucus. Our commitment to representing the interests of all Utahns remains steadfast, and we will prioritize the welfare and prosperity of every individual in our great state over the next 45 days.

We have crafted our 2024 Legislative Priorities with careful consideration of the diverse needs and aspirations of the people we proudly serve. Recognizing the significance of unity and collaboration in tackling the challenges that lie ahead, we aim to collectively shape a future that embodies the values most crucial to our communities - one that is inclusive, just, and resilient.

The outlined priorities highlight the importance of shared responsibilities that go beyond party affiliations. Preserving our environment is about safeguarding natural resources and enhancing our quality of life. Investing in public education is a strategic investment in our shared future, ensuring that each child in Utah has access to a high-quality education. Our state's tax policy must adapt to foster a stronger sense of community and promote equity so all Utahns can prosper. Collaborative efforts are essential in addressing public safety and fostering safer environments for all Utahns through collective action. Addressing challenges through comprehensive and robust social services should be our collective top priority.

In addition to the outlined priorities, we are resolute in our commitment to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) both in higher education and our communities. We firmly believe in creating a state where every individual, regardless of their sexual orientation or identity, feels valued, respected, and protected under the law.

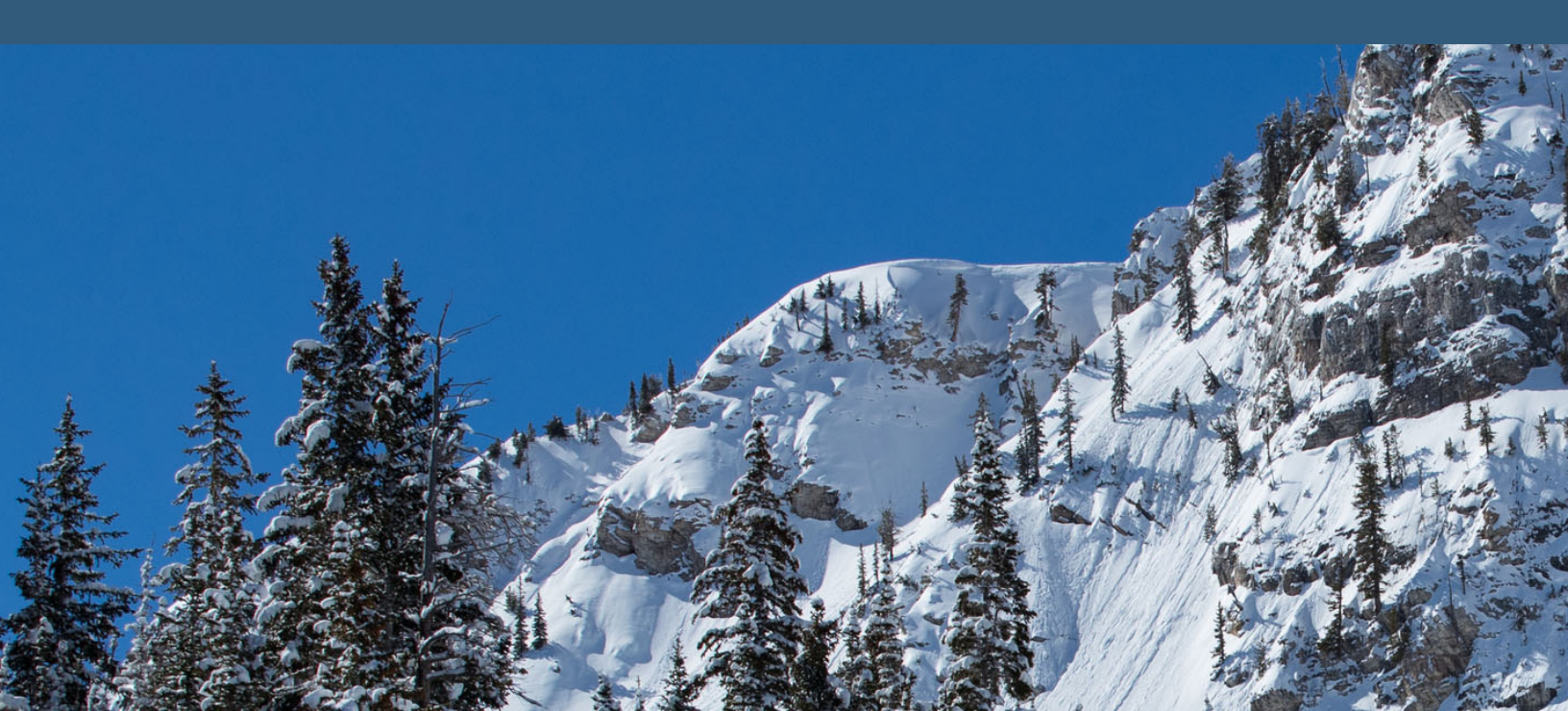
As we enter this legislative session, know that the Utah House Democratic Caucus is dedicated to being your voice in the state legislature. We are committed to fighting for policies that reflect the values and aspirations of all Utahns. Your concerns, dreams, and vision for our state matter, and we will tirelessly advocate for them.

Thank you for trusting us with the responsibility to serve you. Together, we will build a brighter and more inclusive future for Utah.

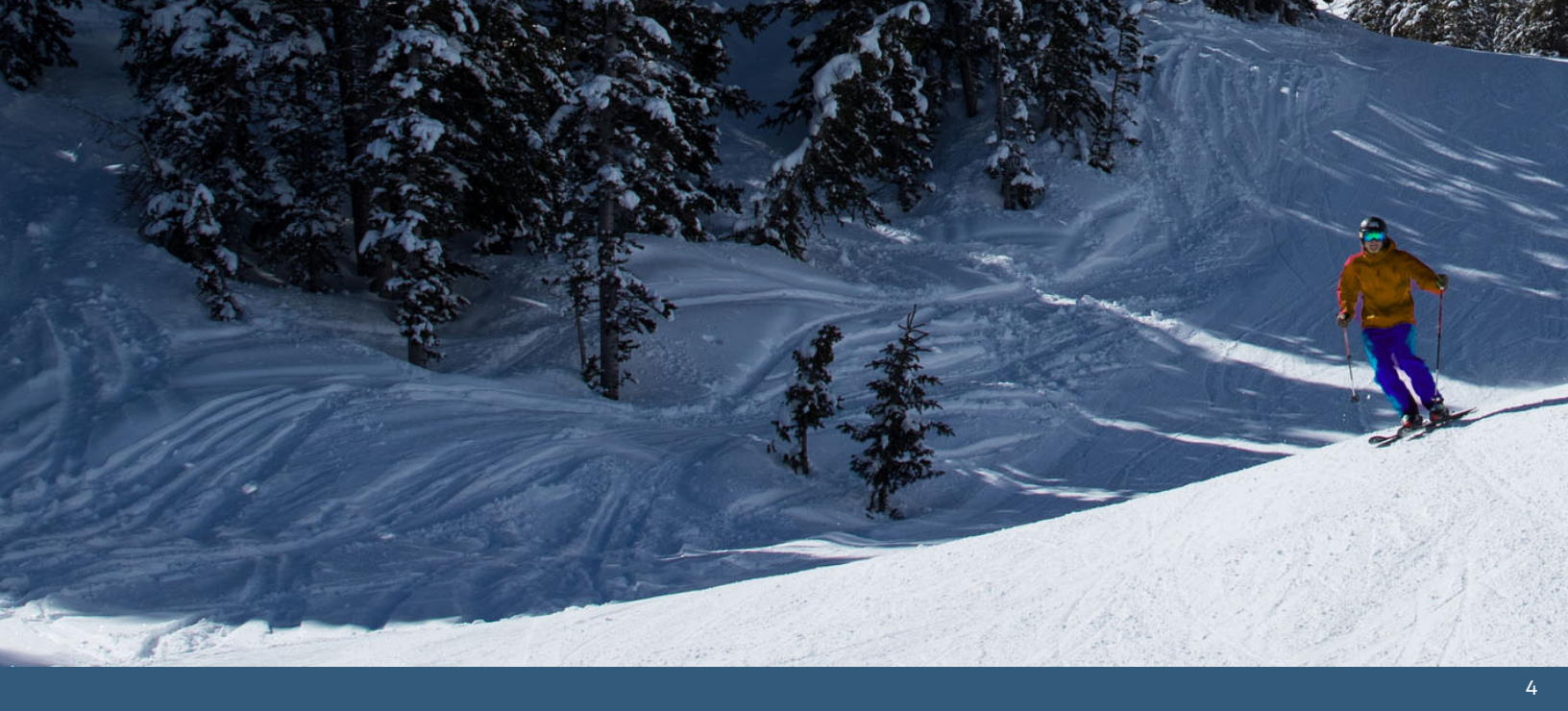
Sincerely,



Angela Romero
Utah House of Representatives Minority Leader



The Utah House of Representatives Democratic Caucus is dedicated to advocating for policies and enacting legislation that prioritizes the welfare and prosperity of every Utahn. Our 2024 Legislative Priorities will lead our fight to ensure your voices are heard at the Utah State Legislature.





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The preservation of the environment is essential for enhancing and sustaining a high quality of life.



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Investing in public education is imperative for societal advancement and community well-being.



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State tax policy needs to evolve to foster a stronger community within our state.



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Collaborative efforts to address public safety are vital in creating safer environments for Utahns.



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Urgent action is needed to address the challenges our communities are facing to ensure long-term resilience.

ENVIRONMENT

Great Salt Lake

The Great Salt Lake (GSL) is being threatened by drought, climate change, and water demands. Utah's future is tied to the lake's future. We must act now to preserve the lake to protect our health, prosperity, and Utah's beautiful ecosystems.

INITIATIVES

Abandon the Bear River Project: The project proposes to divert 25-30% of the Bear River, the primary water source for the Great Salt Lake, to provide municipal water.

Reduce Subsidies for Water Rates: Reduce the contribution for water infrastructure that comes from property taxes and increase the price of water to make up the difference which lowers water consumption.

Infrastructure for Agriculture Water Leasing: It is critical to invest in the necessary infrastructure to move leased water to the Great Salt Lake.

Prohibit Building on GSL Wetlands: Enact legal protections around the Great Salt Lake environment. This includes working against the expansion of I-15 and the Inland Port project plans which threaten the lake's ecosystems.



June 1985

Source: earthobservatory.nasa.gov



July 2022

Source: earthobservatory.nasa.gov

ENVIRONMENT

The Shrinking Salt Lake

Lake Elevation at Saltair Boat Harbor, Great Salt Lake, Utah (ft)



Source: Professor Thomas J. Praff, Ithaca College

Promote Water-Efficient Landscaping:

Half of the water supplied to residences is used indoors, and the other half is used outside. About 95% of indoor water usage is treated and returned to the lake, while all water used for outdoor purposes is fully depleted without any return to the lake. Water-efficient landscaping will help conserve water and decrease the amount of fully depleted residential outdoor water.

Support State Water Engineer: The State Engineer supervises Utah's water. Strengthening the capacity of the State Water Engineer and providing adequate resources to shepherd conserved water to the Great Salt Lake will help stabilize the shrinking lake.

Wetlands Protection and Restoration: Invest in restoration and wetlands protection to promote preservation efforts.

GSL FACTS

Largest saline lake in the Western Hemisphere

Contributes \$1.9 billion to Utah's economy

Provides 7,700 jobs

Supports the highest concentration of Utah's available wetlands

Provides a stopover for millions of birds during migration

Lake effect snow contributes 5-10% of Utah's snowpack

Source: greatsaltlake.utah.gov

ENVIRONMENT

Air Quality

Utah’s poor air quality is a direct threat to both our health and quality of life. It disproportionately impacts our most diverse and vulnerable communities and leads to both short-term and long-term health problems. If immediate action is not taken, our growing population and the increase in infrastructure development will further escalate the levels of pollutants in the air, adversely impacting our state.

INITIATIVES

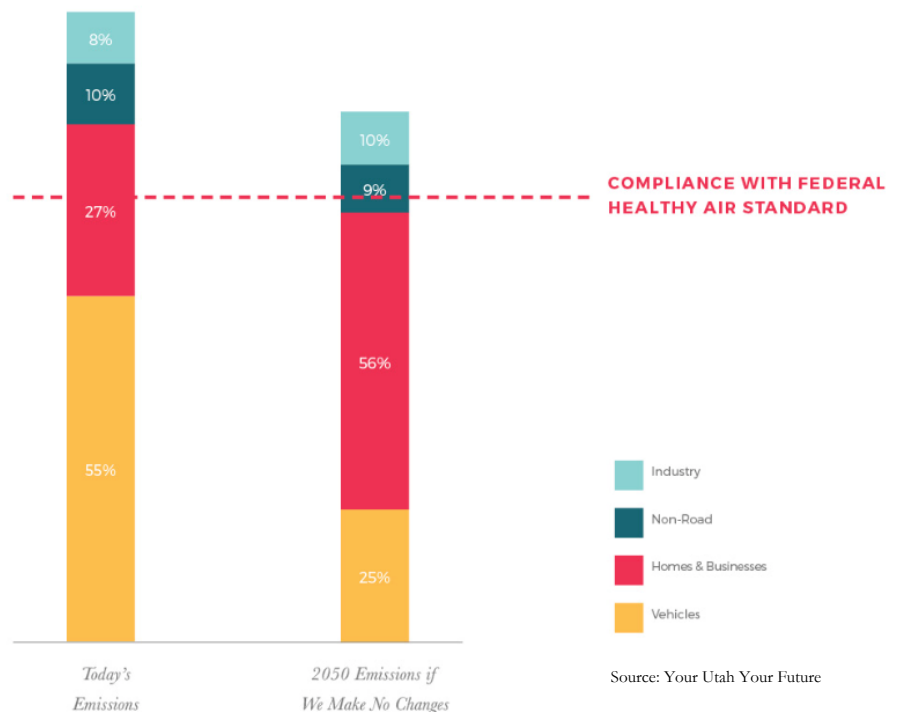
Contain Methane: Methane, a greenhouse gas over 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the near term, is responsible for at least a quarter of today’s global warming. Strategies to reduce methane release will be crucial in containing this potent greenhouse gas.

Emission Regulations: Implementing a tax structure that incentivizes lower-emission vehicles can influence the adoption of eco-friendly transportation options.

Electrification of Buildings: Transitioning to “clean” buildings by embracing electrification and modern heating/cooling systems will significantly reduce air emissions.

Expand Transit Service: Expanding public transit service along key East-West routes is crucial to alleviating congestion and enhancing accessibility. This ensures efficient and sustainable transportation options for commuters and our growing population.

SOURCES OF EMISSIONS



ENVIRONMENT

K-12 Transit Pass Pilot Project: Under this initiative, public schools can apply for funding to provide transit passes for students and staff, fostering easier access to education through enhanced transportation options.

Prioritize Sustainable Mobility Instead of Widening I-15: Rather than widening I-15, which would adversely affect local businesses and residential areas, prioritize additional investment in public transportation. This approach addresses environmental concerns and promotes an efficient and equitable approach to meeting the region's growing transportation needs.

Riparian Corridor Protections: Utah's rapid growth threatens its natural environment, especially urban riparian areas. Considering riparian corridors in long-term planning helps improve stream health, prevent flooding, and increase safety and recreation.

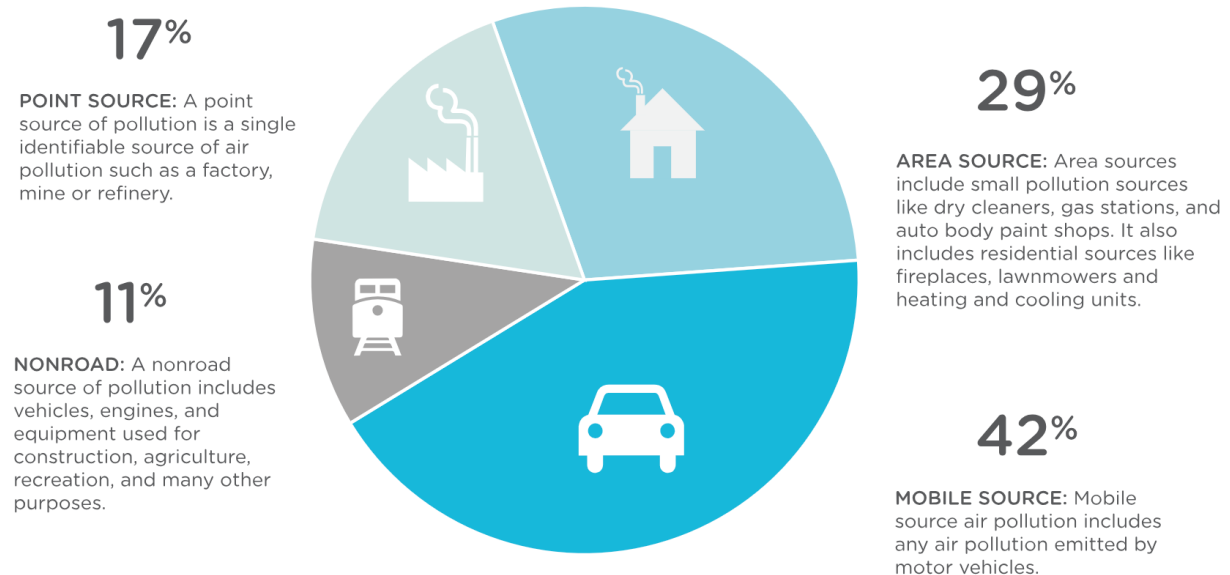
Set an Air Quality Goal: A state air quality goal establishes a comprehensive framework to guide and prioritize efforts in reducing air pollutants. Defining clear objectives enables taking specific and measurable steps to address environmental challenges, providing a strategy for implementing policies, regulations, and initiatives that collectively contribute to cleaner air.

Support Geothermal Energy: Investment in this clean energy source reduces reliance on fossil fuels and drastically reduces emissions going into the air.



WHERE DOES UTAH'S AIR POLLUTION COME FROM?

In 2019, Air pollution along the Wasatch Front is measured coming from the following sources:

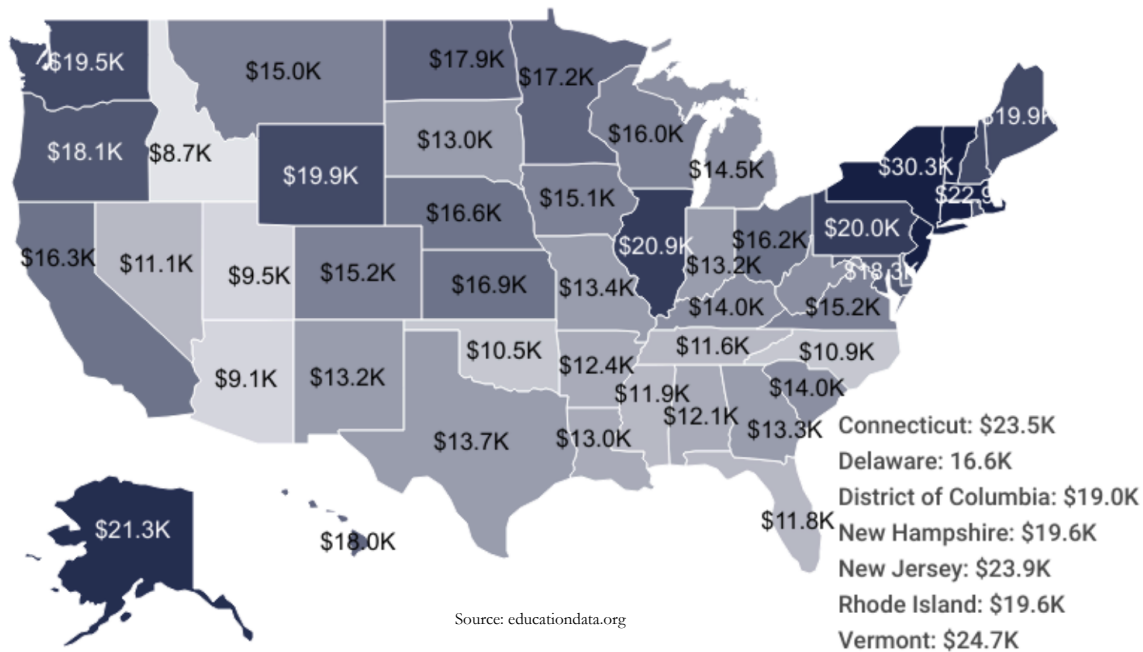


EDUCATION

Education

Utah has historically underfunded public education compared to the national average. It is imperative that our state budget prioritizes the needs of our students, teachers, and administrators, ensuring they receive adequate funding to thrive. The overall success of Utah is intricately tied to cultivating a well-educated community.

Public K-12 Spending Per Student



Sources: United States Census Bureau & National Center for Education Statistics

INITIATIVES

Advanced Degree Funding: Investment in advanced degree funding for public educators is crucial for fostering continuous professional development and expertise within the teaching community. By providing financial support for advanced education, we empower educators to enhance their skills and knowledge, ultimately benefiting the quality of education for students.

Automated Safety Enforcement: Implementing a speed safety camera program in school zones is crucial for enhancing the safety of students and pedestrians. Enforcing speed limits helps prevent accidents, ensuring a secure environment around schools.

EDUCATION

Compensation Increases: Paraprofessionals and support staff deserve a fair compensation increase that reflects their invaluable contributions to the educational system.

Digital Citizenship Curriculum: Integrating a digital citizenship curriculum system-wide is imperative for empowering students with the skills to navigate the modern digital world responsibly.

Healthy School Meals Initiative: Reducing food insecurity and enhancing dietary intake is essential for our students to have a positive and conducive learning environment.

In Utah, 316,980 people are facing hunger - and of them 93,050 are children.

1 in 11 people



face hunger.

1 in 10 children

face hunger.

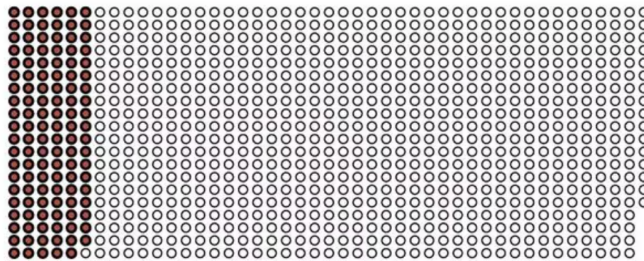
Source: Feeding America

8% WPU Increase: Advocating for an 8% increase in the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) is crucial for ensuring ample funding, improving resources, and enhancing student opportunities. A substantial WPU increase would empower schools to improve educational quality and better meet the diverse needs of students.

Invest in Safe Schools: Allocating resources to enhance earthquake safety measures in school infrastructure, such as reinforcing masonry, is a vital step in safeguarding the well-being of students and staff.

119 schools in Utah will likely be unsafe in an earthquake

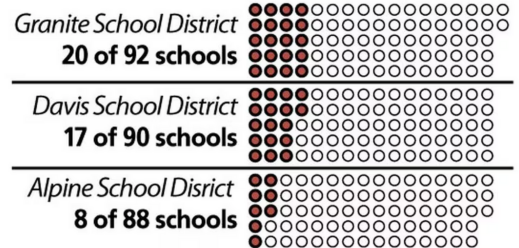
That's out of 896 schools in traditional K-12 districts and about 72,000 students impacted (or 12% of the student population here)



Source: The Federal Emergency Management Agency

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTOPHER CHERRINGTON | The Salt Lake Tribune

District with the highest number of unsafe schools



Source: The Federal Emergency Management Agency

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTOPHER CHERRINGTON
The Salt Lake Tribune

Math Education Investment: Training math coaches in best teaching practices and deploying coaches throughout the state is crucial in narrowing achievement gaps and ensuring equal opportunities for all students to excel in this field.

Voucher Accountability: It is crucial to implement rigorous oversight and transparent accountability measures in the state's voucher program. This guarantees effective and appropriate utilization of public funds, and ensures that students participating in the program meet established educational standards.

TAX POLICY

Tax Policy

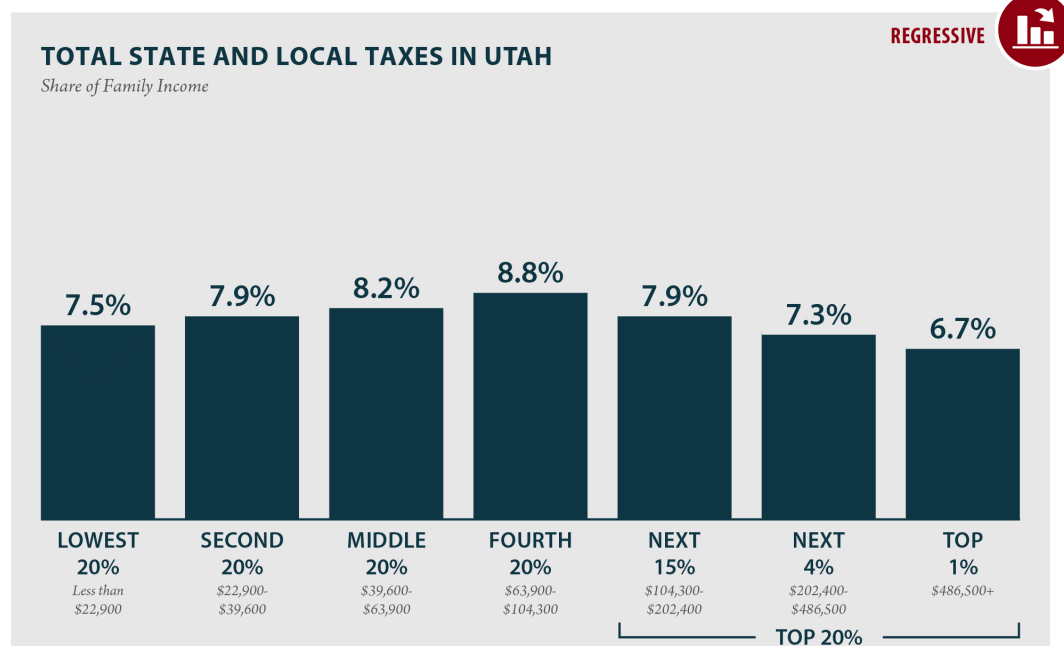
Utah is often regarded as one of the economically best-positioned states in the nation, but our current tax structure disproportionately favors the wealthy, neglecting hardworking Utahns striving to make ends meet. Given the ongoing growth and evolution of our state’s population and economy, it is essential for our tax policy to adapt. Introducing policies based on progressive taxation ideas will benefit all Utahns, fostering a stronger community within our state.

INITIATIVES

Eliminate State Income Tax on Supplemental Security Income: This is crucial to alleviate the financial burden on vulnerable populations, such as seniors and individuals with disabilities. This measure ensures that those relying on fixed incomes can better sustain their basic needs and maintain a dignified standard of living.

Enact Refundable Earned Income Credit: This credit is essential to promote economic inclusivity by providing additional financial support to low and moderate-income families. This measure not only eases the financial strain on households but also stimulates economic activity by putting more resources into the hands of those most likely to spend them locally, thereby fostering community growth.

Income Tax Modifications: Adopting a progressive tax structure that implements rates based on income promotes financial equity. The proposed approach raises marginal tax

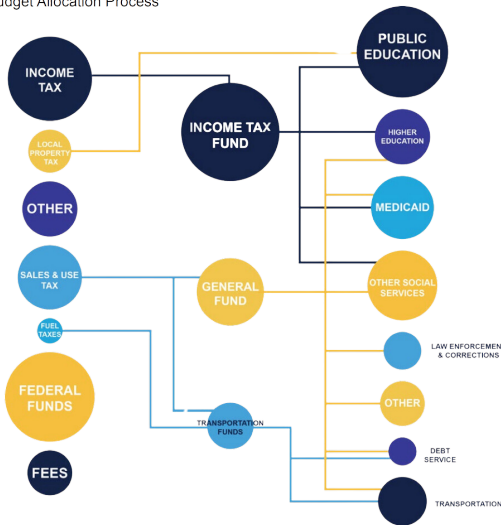


Source: Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy

TAX POLICY

rates at defined income levels on federal returns, ensuring that those with higher incomes contribute proportionately more to our society. For example, a higher marginal rate would apply at \$250,000 and another incrementally higher rate at \$750,000.

FIGURE 2: Utah's Budget Allocation Process



Note: Illustrative of the most significant sources and uses but doesn't show the flow of all funds
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Governor's Office of Planning & Budget

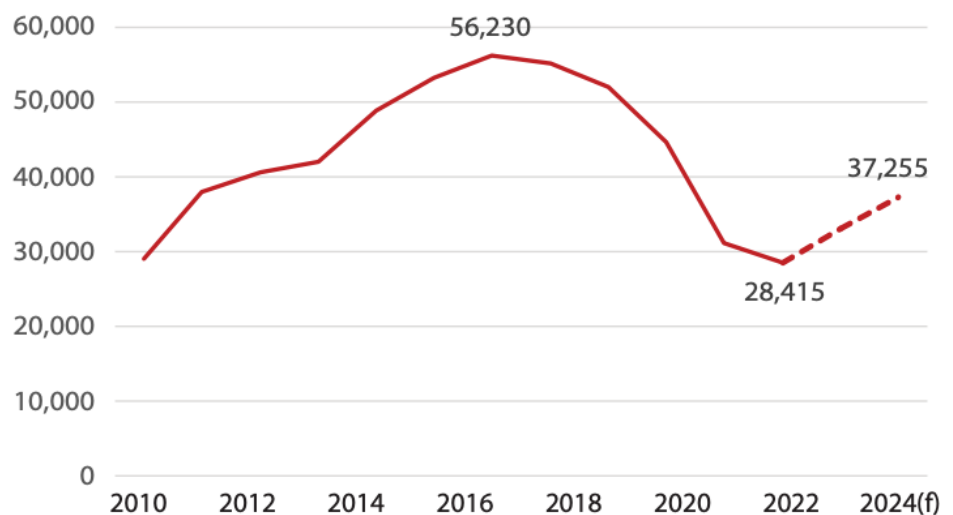
Source: Gov. Cox FY 25 Budget Recommendations

Index Social Security Thresholds for Inflation: Our state's senior population is facing financial challenges. Indexing social security thresholds would allow recipients whose federal benefit is adjusted for inflation to remain eligible for the Utah credit.

Oppose Funding Voucher Program: We must safeguard our public education system. We oppose further funding to the voucher program to help ensure that every student has equal access to quality education and prevent the diversion of funds from essential public schools.

Transparency and Higher Taxes in Investor-Owned Homes: Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in investors using housing as an investment, with approximately 27% of current home purchases made by investors. Projections indicate that by 2030, investors could own up to 40% of US homes. Transparency in home ownership and the introduction of higher taxes on investment homes are essential to discourage this trend, ultimately expanding the availability of homes in the market for individuals and families.

Figure 10: Cumulative Housing Shortage in Utah, 2011-2024(f)



(f) = forecast (2023-2024)

Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public Safety

Public safety is a shared responsibility that extends beyond law enforcement to encompass the active involvement of individuals, communities, and local authorities. Collaborative efforts will foster connections and are vital components in creating safer communities for everyone in our state. By recognizing public safety as a collaborative obligation, we empower our communities to work together in a concerted effort to build resilience and promote a secure living environment for all.

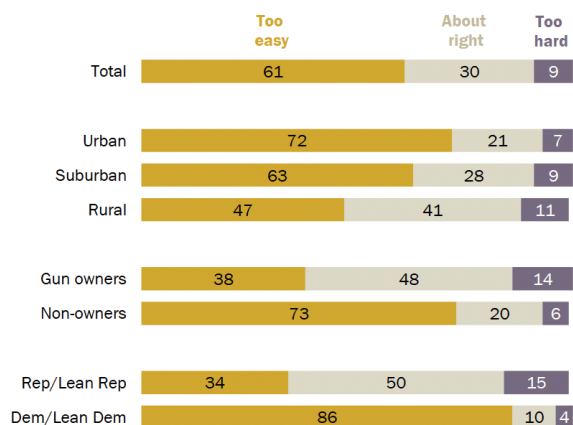
INITIATIVES

Department of Corrections Compensation Increases: The Department of Corrections must see compensation increases for their employees to ensure they can recruit and retain qualified professionals to maintain an effective and stable correctional facility.

Firearm Access: The need for penalties for failure to secure firearms is paramount in safeguarding public safety. By imposing consequences for inadequate firearm storage, we discourage negligence and underscore the gravity of ensuring that firearms are responsibly secured to prevent unauthorized use and potential harm.

About 6 in 10 Americans say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun in this country

% who say it is ___ to legally obtain a gun in this country



Note: No answer responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

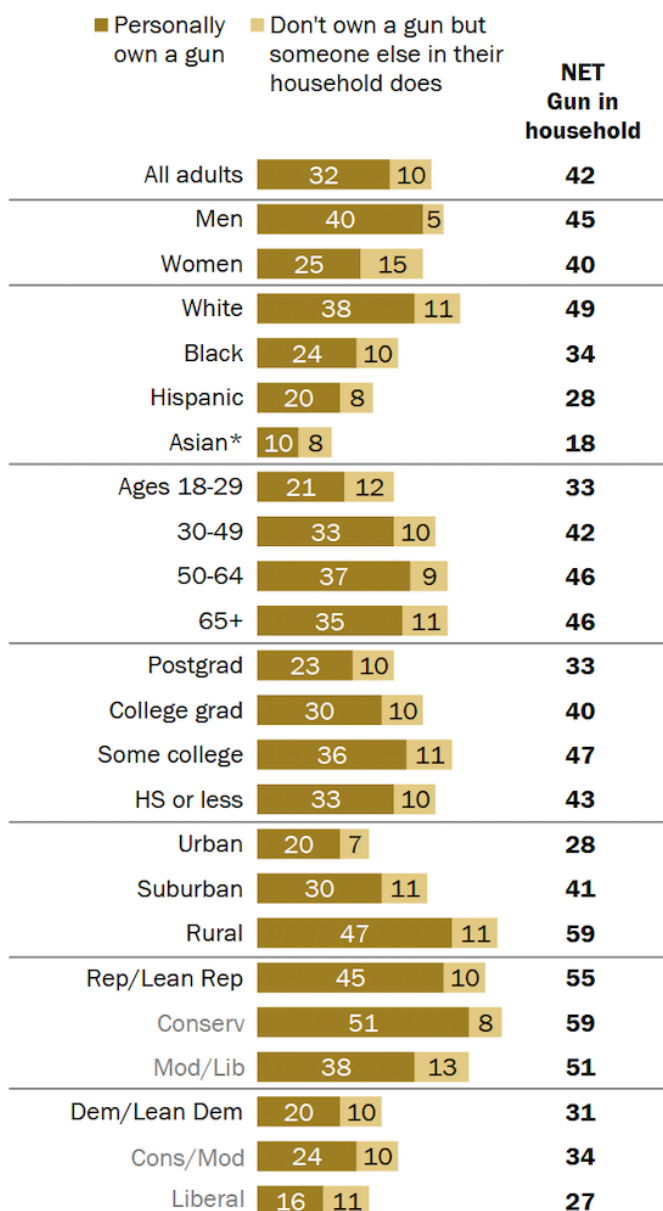
Gun Safety: Responsible firearm ownership must be embraced by every Utahn to ensure our community's safety. Acquiring the necessary training and knowledge to handle firearms and securing and storing them responsibly will help prevent unnecessary harm.

Instill a Waiting Period for Gun Purchases: A 5-day waiting period for gun purchases is a prudent measure aimed at promoting thorough background checks before acquiring a firearm. This additional time provides a crucial window for authorities to conduct comprehensive evaluations, contributing to overall safety and responsible firearms ownership.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Nearly a third of U.S. adults say they personally own a gun

% who say they ...



* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include only those who report being one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanic adults are of any race.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Murdered and Missing Indigenous Relatives Task Force:

Indigenous relatives are disproportionately likely to experience violence, be murdered, or go missing compared to other demographic groups. Although they make up just 1.5% of the population in Utah, American Indian and Alaska Native relatives account for over 5% of all murder victims. A full-time state employee (FTE) is necessary to enhance coordination and communication across state agencies and Tribes to ensure findings and recommendations from the task force are adequately implemented.

Rape Crisis and Service Centers

Standard of Care: Establishing standards of care for a rape crisis and service center ensures the delivery of safe, effective, and appropriate services for victims of sexual assault, guided by best practices.

Strengthen Sexual Offense Penalties:

Establishing a third-degree felony offense for sexual conduct without affirmative consent highlights the importance of ensuring explicit consent in all interactions. Including this offense in the Sex and Kidnap Offender Registry amends it to emphasize the tracking and addressing of instances where affirmative consent is lacking and promotes accountability and safer environments.

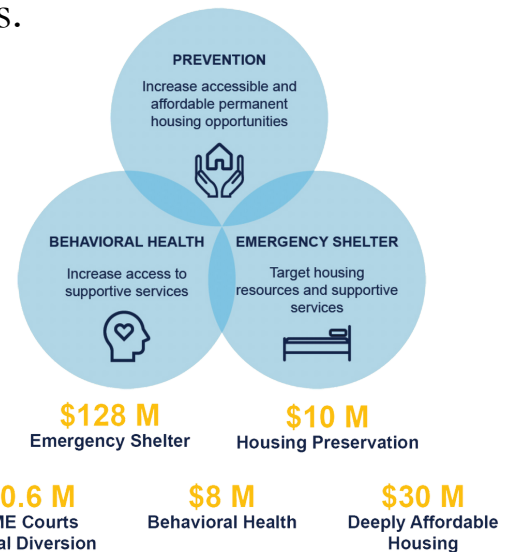
SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Services

Utahns deserve a comprehensive approach to social services. We must address the challenges our communities are facing in access to housing, child care, and mental health support. By adopting a holistic perspective, we aim to create a safety net that responds to immediate challenges but also empowers individuals and families for long-term success. Through collaboration and innovative solutions, we seek to build resilient communities where everyone in our state has the opportunity to lead fulfilling and dignified lives.

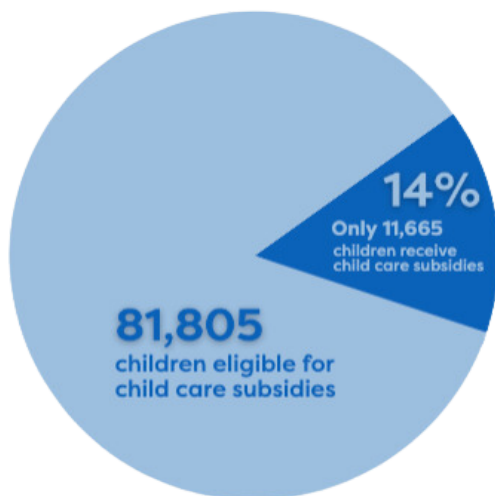
INITIATIVES

Addressing Homelessness: Work to secure the Governor’s request for \$190 million to address homelessness in our state. As outlined in his proposed budget, the money would go toward emergency shelters, housing preservation, diversion programs, behavioral health care, deeply affordable housing, and other services.



Source: Gov. Cox FY 25 Budget Recommendations

Number of Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidies vs. Number of Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies



Source: Voices for Utah Children - 2023 Mapping Care for Kids

Child Care Grants: Increasing access and affordability of child care is essential for empowering families, enabling parents to participate in the workforce with confidence, and ensuring that children receive high-quality early education and care that sets the foundation for their future success. We must replace the federal child care center stabilization grants that have expired with a state-level grant.

Circuit Breaker Tax Relief: Increasing the qualifying income levels for the Circuit Breaker Property Tax Relief program is essential for Utah’s senior citizens on fixed or low incomes whose property values have

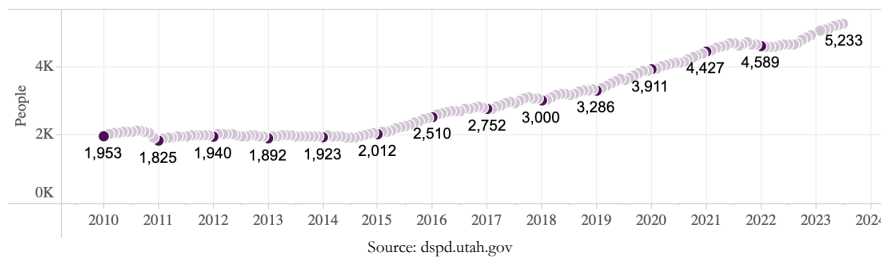
SOCIAL SERVICES

increased without a corresponding rise in income. This adjustment is necessary to alleviate the burden of rising property taxes.

Down Payment for First-Time Homebuyers: Providing down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers to purchase a new or resale home is essential in promoting widespread homeownership, breaking down financial barriers, and fostering stability in the housing market. It is imperative to expand the existing program, currently limited to new home purchases, to also include resale homes.

Disability Coverage and Services: Expanding coverage and enhancing support systems are crucial steps toward fostering inclusivity and ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the

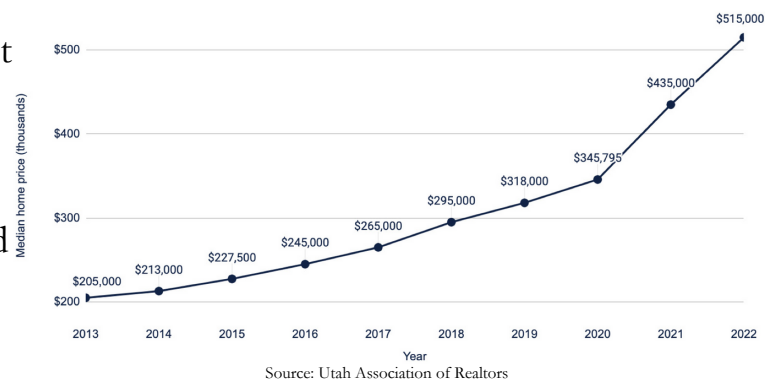
People Waiting for Ongoing Services



resources and assistance they need to lead fulfilling lives. By supporting increased access to service coverage, we can dramatically improve the quality of life and health outcomes for people with disabilities and their families.

Equal Wages for Workers with Disabilities: Ending the sub-minimum wage for individuals with disabilities is a crucial step toward promoting fair and equitable employment practices.

UTAH MEDIAN HOME PRICE, SEPTEMBER 2013 - SEPTEMBER 2022



Homebuyer Assistance: It is crucial to support innovative programs in the state that offer financial assistance to working Utahns. By expanding ownership opportunities, we can make stable and affordable housing more accessible to a greater number of individuals and families in our communities.

Mental Health Support: Increasing mental health support is paramount in addressing the growing challenges individuals and communities face. By investing in accessible and comprehensive mental health services, we can diminish stigma, provide timely intervention, and promote overall well-being for every Utahn.

Medicaid Coverage for Prenatal Care: All expectant mothers need to have access to vital healthcare services. The state must implement policies that raise the income threshold for Medicaid coverage to decrease the rate of uninsured mothers during pregnancy. Prenatal care coverage contributes to healthier pregnancies, improves birth outcomes, and fosters long-term public health for a healthier future generation.







UTAH HOUSE

DEMOCRATS

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