

66 NBCSL's Legislative Priorities stem from our organization's policy resolutions. They reflect the needs, wants, and current realities of our constituents and taken together, they help direct our efforts—as state legislators—over the next year. Despite what has been done to improve the lives of minorities and low-income communities in America, there is still a lot of work to be done. Our legislative priorities represent the first step in the process to begin this important work. Everyone knows "all politics is local," but to us, all policy is local too. Decisions made on the state level continue to influence national policy and directly affect the lives of our constituents. So, as state legislators, we must work every day to make sure our communities' priorities become every decision-

Representative Joe Armstrong (TN)

President, National Black Caucus of State Legislators

maker's priorities.

POLICY COMMITTEE ABBREVIATIONS

AGR: Agriculture

BFI: Business, Financial Services

and Insurance

EDU: Education

EPHS: Emergency Preparedness/

Homeland Security

ETE: Energy Transportation and

Environment

GSE: Gaming, Sports and

Entertainment

HHS: Health and Human Services

HSE: Housing

IAF: International Affairs

LMVA: Labor, Military and Veterans'

Affairs

LJE: Law, Justice and Ethics

TST: Telecommunications, Science

and Technology

YTH: Youth

Despite the work done to improve the socio-economic and political status of minorities, for many, actual parity remains

out of reach. Millions of Americans still need access to quality public education as well as to quality, affordable health care. They still need sustainable jobs, lasting economic development, and fair homeownership options. And, in the 21st century, too many Americans still fight for voting and constitutional rights. State legislators across the country are at the forefront of key policy solutions that will set the course of the nation for years to come. With a heightened level of attention on policy decisions in statehouses in recent years, it is even more important that state lawmakers work together to improve our nation's health and well-being. Through this legislative work, these priorities—to improve the lives of the nation's vulnerable and under-represented—will be placed at the center of conversation to advance real policy change.

Please Note: Each policy priority is addressed by related resolutions denoted by committee name abbreviation and number.

PROTECTING CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS FOR ALL AMERICANS

NBCSL members are the result of how far our nation's democratic system has evolved over the course of history. Yet, the ability for underrepresented and disenfranchised constituencies to exercise their voices has come from hard-fought, centuries-long struggles for civil and human rights—rights that face constant threats today. State legislators must remain steadfast in upholding the protections promised by the United States Constitution to eradicate discrimination and to correct injustice. To meet these goals, NBCSL calls on states to

- Uphold voting rights for all Americans by rejecting legislation that mandates voter identification and curtails early voting, which disenfranchise voters. Instead, NBCSL calls for expanding "no excuse" early voting nationwide, and adopting automatic and portable voter registration. Additionally, NBCSL encourages states to support legislation to restore voting rights to ex-offenders who have completed their sentences.
- Reject and/or repeal dangerous "Stand Your Ground" & "Shoot First" laws, which can unnecessarily lead to deadly force during confrontations.

Finally bring justice for the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama by issuing a posthumous declaration of innocence.

Addressed by NBCSL Resolutions: LJE-13-06, LJE-13-08, LJE-13-16, LJE-13-19

FOSTERING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MINORITY OWNERSHIP

Home ownership and entrepreneurship are traditional pillars that drive American job and wealth creation. Unfortunately, Black Americans and other minority groups continue to suffer tremendous disparities in accessing sufficient and reasonable credit, capital, and terms, resulting in the economic stagnation of many communities of color. All Americans deserve fair access to the tools and protections that allow them to contribute to our nation's economic success. NBCSL supports proactive steps to make the American Dream a reality for all. To achieve these goals, NBCSL calls on states to

- Create a level playing field for minority businesses by reducing burdensome certification barriers for minority businesses on public works projects, enhancing government contracting opportunities for small businesses by utilizing controlled insurance programs, and encouraging minority-owned firms to participate in state pension management.
- Protect personal wealth and assets by establishing state and community-based strategies and intervention programs, such as mediation, to keep families in their homes. Additionally, NBCSL encourages states to adopt legislation to reform property partition laws to protect owners of inherited property from forced partitions.
- Strengthen consumer financial protections by supporting responsible lending practices and products, particularly in gaining access to credit.

Addressed by NBCSL Resolutions: BFI-13-14, BFI-13-29, BFI-13-37, HSE-13-13, LJE-13-39

ENSURING QUALITY & AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

In 2009, 46 million Americans were uninsured. This disparity still exists today. Now that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) has been passed, signed, and constitutionally affirmed, it is time state lawmakers take the necessary steps to fully implement the law in the states and secure world-class health care for all Americans. NBCSL has been at the vanguard of our nation's journey to reform its health care system and calls on states to

- Implement ACA goals, such as standardized electronic health records and prescriptions as well as healthcare cost transparency for businesses and consumers. Furthermore, NBCSL encourages states to develop Essential Health Benefit packages that include a wide range of health care products and services that meet diverse patient needs and ensure all Americans have access to affordable, high quality, culturally appropriate health care.
- Expand fair access to effective treatment and care through specialty drug access and choice, and telehealth services.

Addressed by NBCSL Resolutions: BFI-13-20, BFI-13-21, BFI-13-24, BFI-13-25, HHS-13-23, HHS-13-32, TST-13-03

PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

The vitality of a community begins with wellness. Yet, many communities of color still lack the necessary resources, access to built environments and support structures, and education on steps to improve their health. By focusing on preventative measures and screening, communities can both combat preventable diseases and greatly improve the quality of life for Americans of all ages. NBCSL calls on states to

 Nurture healthy kids through infant nutrition services, early childhood home visitation, and treating diabetes in schools. Additionally, states can promote physical activity, character-building, and social-emotional support for children through programs such as *The First Tee*.

- Fight malnutrition and obesity by improving community screening, treatment, and public awareness initiatives.
- Focus on services to early diagnose and/or prevent diseases like Alzheimer's and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and improve dental health through community water fluoridation programs.

Addressed by NBCSL Resolutions: AGR-13-09, AGR 13-10, AGR-13-15, EDU 13-28, ETE-13-02HHS-13-30, HHS 13-33, HHS-13-40, YTH-13-38

IMPROVING EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

From cultural barriers between students and school officials to lower graduation rates, and disproportionate school discipline measures, many children of color still face unique challenges in receiving a quality education. Education is the backbone of our nation—not only in cultivating the minds of our children, but also ensuring that our young people are prepared to compete in the global economy. That is why NBCSL has long supported public policies to close the achievement gap and improve learning for students. To further these goals, NBCSL calls on states to

 Maximize academic achievement through increasing cultural competency for school officials toward male

- Black and Latino students, proactively engaging PK-16 stakeholders to establish achievement strategies, limiting graduation waivers, and raising the compulsory education age to 18.
- Cultivate safe schools and promoting constructive learning environments by implementing effective school discipline strategies that minimize pushing children out of school, encourage positive behavior, and utilize data and best practices.

Addressed by NBCSL Resolutions: EDU-13-34, EDU-13-35, EDU-13-36

CREATING 21ST CENTURY JOBS

In order to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market, it is essential that the United States make robust investments in modern and emerging industries. This is a national priority, but there are clear steps states can take to encourage development of green and media technologies. Working together, we can create well-paying jobs here for American workers and maintain our economic leadership around the world. To meet these challenges, NBCSL calls on states to

- Support clean energy through legislation that promotes natural gas vehicles.
- Encourage the development of film, television, and digital media production through legislation on job training, construction and infrastructure, investment tax credits, and regulatory reforms.

Addressed by NBCSL Resolutions: ETE-13-43, GSE-13-04

The National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) is a membership association representing over 600 African-American state legislators from 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NBCSL members represent upwards of 50 million Americans of all racial backgrounds. NBCSL tracks legislation at all levels of government and actively monitors state and federal policy initiatives to provide its members with important information. Each year, NBCSL members pass policy resolutions that directly impact federal and state policy. The organization focuses on U.S. domestic policy and is committed to policies that positively affect all Americans. Learn more at www.nbcsl.org.