ALLIANCE FOR OPPORTUNITY

The Opportunity Agenda: A Governor's Roadmap

10 Executive Orders to Advance Work, Strengthen Families, Protect the Vulnerable, and Restore Upward Mobility

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Table of Contents

PREFACE

PATHWAYS TO WORK

PROSPEROUS FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

PROTECTION FOR THE VULNERABLE

Introduction

Across the country, Americans are asking a simple but urgent question: why does it feel harder than ever to build a stable, flourishing life? And state leaders are grappling with how to attract top employers and develop a workforce to match in a competitive landscape. Improving affordability and strengthening the workforce will require policies that remove barriers to economic mobility and help more residents participate fully in the economy.

Too often, public systems are designed to manage hardship rather than promote long-term stability and self-sufficiency. A high cost of living, limited access to education and training, and benefit structures that create cliffs can discourage work, career advancement, and skill development.

At the same time, fragmented services make it difficult for families, workers, and employers to navigate pathways to opportunity.

A more effective approach would align investments in workforce development, education, child care, and human services to support upward mobility, expand the talent pipeline, and help residents build the skills and financial stability needed to meet the demands of a growing economy.

At a time when Washington is often slow to respond to the challenges facing working families, governors have a historic opportunity to set the stage for rapid reform of the social safety net. The most effective solutions to poverty, workforce shortages, and obstacles to economic mobility are often found closest to the people governors serve.

A governor can set a clear vision that aligns state agencies, removes barriers to work and advancement, strengthens families, and empowers communities to innovate. Through bold executive leadership, states can move beyond programs that merely manage need and instead build systems that expand opportunity, reward work, develop talent, and help residents achieve greater independence and stability. By acting now, a governor can position their state as a national model for economic mobility, workforce development, and human flourishing.

This Governor's Roadmap offers **10 ready-to-implement Executive Orders** designed to help new administrations act quickly. Each Order focuses on a core barrier to upward mobility and gives governors a practical framework for reforming state systems, aligning agencies, and delivering measurable results for families.

The Roadmap draws on successes in several states, including Governor Landry's One Door to Work Executive Order in Louisiana, Governor Stitt's Welfare Transparency and Accountability Executive Order in Oklahoma, Governor Gianforte's Housing Task Force in Montana, and Governor Sanders's 10:33 Initiative in Arkansas.

The Roadmap is organized around three pillars that governors can directly implement to set the tone for their administration's efforts to grow their economies and train their workforces:

1) Pathways to Work: Highlights how to move Americans from dependence to earned success. These Executive Orders advance a Work First state systems transformation, overhaul career and technical education and apprenticeship pathways, and address benefit cliffs that can trap families in poverty by penalizing advancement.

2) Prosperous Families and Communities: Focuses on the conditions that allow families to form, work, save, and thrive. These Executive Orders address child care, healthy family formation, and housing abundance so that more families can build stable lives in communities of opportunity.

3) Protection for the Vulnerable: Emphasizes securing and strengthening public systems so that they serve the people they were created to help. These Executive Orders enhance anti-fraud and program integrity protections, improve child safety, modernize disability policy, and renew rural health systems so that vulnerable Americans receive better care, stronger safeguards, and greater opportunity.

The goal is not simply to reduce poverty on paper. It is to ensure that citizens flourish.

That means building systems that expect those who are work-capable to find employment, protect the truly vulnerable, support families, reward progress, leverage existing local solutions, and demand accountability from government programs. It means breaking down silos between agencies, measuring success by outcomes rather than enrollment, and ensuring that taxpayer dollars reach the people who need them most.

Governors can—and must—lead this critical chapter of reform. By using the executive authority already available to them, they can launch a state-level agenda that restores the promise of upward mobility and gives families a better chance to build lives marked by work, stability, purpose, and hope.

This Roadmap is intended to help governors begin on Day One with executive actions that will leave a legacy of success for the people in their state.

About the Alliance for Opportunity

The Alliance for Opportunity is a coalition that works with state and federal leaders to transform the safety net from a fragmented system that merely manages poverty into an integrated system that restores work opportunity, family stability, dignity, and upward mobility.

Our current safety net system is a complicated labyrinth of more than 100 programs that are, at best, poorly coordinated. Multiple legislative committees at the federal and state levels create and guide the various programs. Governmental agencies at the federal, state, and local levels then administer them with varying—and even conflicting—eligibility rules and payments distributed by an assortment of technical mechanisms.

The system creates obstacles to our low-income neighbors' ability to flourish. It is riddled with government-generated disincentives to work—like welfare cliffs and marriage penalties—that impede both individual progress and family formation. Benefits should never pay more than work. Unfortunately, the current safety net system traps our neighbors in poverty's revolving door.

Of course, the poorly functioning system is also expensive, necessitating higher taxes, less spending elsewhere, or more debt pushed onto future generations. But the real loss is human potential. If state policies create a permanent lower-income class dependent on government assistance, the lives of people in that class are less fulfilled, and society loses their contribution.

Our coalition is united in the belief that the U.S. safety net needs a paradigm shift. Our low-income, work-capable neighbors deserve to move out of dependency on government and find hope and lasting self-sufficiency through community and work. This requires a visionary new anti-poverty framework. Our three core institutions—government, civil society, and the economy—must work together to holistically empower low-income citizens to rise above government dependency and find true opportunity.

Alliance for Opportunity Members

Georgia Center for Opportunity
Pelican Institute for Public Policy
Texas Public Policy Foundation
Archbridge Institute
Cicero Action
Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy
Empower Mississippi
FREOPP
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Jack Kemp Foundation
The Buckeye Institute
Sutherland Institute — A New Birth of Freedom

About the Editor

Les Ford is a Senior Fellow at the Alliance for Opportunity, where she works to uplift vulnerable citizens. She focuses her research on the entirety of the safety net: reforming welfare so low-income Americans can build flourishing lives, transforming U.S. health care to be free-market-based and consumer-oriented, ensuring individuals with disabilities are empowered, and strengthening child welfare so every child is safe.

Before joining the Alliance, Les was the Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy on the White House's Domestic Policy Council from 2018–2020, where she worked to fulfill the president's objective to empower all Americans by implementing the Executive Order, "Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility." Les also led the White House initiative to draft the Executive Order, "Strengthening the Child Welfare System for America's Children." Before that, Les served as a legislative advisor to Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) on health care, welfare reform, education, labor, religious freedom, and child welfare policy.

Les is also the President of Ford Policy Solutions. She, her husband, and their four children live in Alexandria, Virginia.

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Executive Order: Work First One Door Transformation

What It Is: A governor can lead a bold modernization of state government that strengthens the workforce, expands economic opportunity, and makes the state more competitive for growth. By realigning major workforce and safety net programs around a single, work-oriented strategy, states can better address the drivers of long-term poverty and help more people enter the labor force.

The Work First One Door model is a foundational reform that replaces fragmentation with coordination, making it easier for citizens to access employment and the support they need to work and advance. It is a practical, high-impact strategy to move more people off the sidelines, restore dignity through work, and build a stronger economy for the future.

What It Accomplishes: Under this model, a governor can align programs and funding streams behind a single workforce strategy and agency so that safety net programs function not as dead ends, but as effective supports that help people find work, advance, and achieve self-sufficiency. One Door to Work gives states a practical framework to break down agency silos, unify fragmented programs, and build a more accountable, work-oriented system. It enables states to standardize oversight, integrate eligibility and data systems, strengthen program integrity, and create clear ownership for outcomes.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Request an Audit of Workforce and Safety Net Programs and Agencies:

- Evaluate the outcomes and efficiency of current workforce and safety net systems.
- Analyze how recipients receiving safety net assistance are or are not connected to work and training programs.
- Create and evaluate a map of physical, data, financial, and employee assets.

Establish a Statewide Strategy Taskforce:

- Establish a taskforce of representatives or designees of the key agency heads overseeing: the State Workforce Board, community colleges, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Veterans Affairs, Unemployment Insurance, Vocational Rehabilitation, Education, Health, Corrections, the Office of the State Speaker, and the State Senate.
- Outline what the state should consider as improved outcomes and how the state should evaluate them.
- Issue a final report containing recommendations for the integration of workforce and safety net programs, with a specific schedule for completion.

Integrate Safety Net and Workforce Program Administration, Service Delivery, and Finances:

- Establish a unified statewide planning and governance structure by authorizing a State Workforce Board that incorporates the local workforce boards.
- Eliminate duplicative local governance, reporting, and operating requirements.
- Redirect administrative overhead toward direct training and work-based learning.

Incorporate Performance Transparency and Accountability:

- Enable the consolidated receipt and administration of workforce funds to increase transparency.
- Replace fragmented local oversight and compliance models with a single, statewide accountability and monitoring framework.
- Measure outcomes for all programs after exit.
- Strengthen employer engagement through the development of a dedicated, employer-facing workforce solutions model.

State Examples:

- Utah Audit: 28 Utah State Legislature, A Review of the Coordination of Utah's Employment and Training Programs.
- Louisiana Audit: Louisiana 2023 Regular Session, HR 100.
- Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, Louisiana Taskforce Executive Order, JML 24-44.
- Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, Louisiana Workforce Modernization Executive Order, JML 26-011.

Executive Order: Career and Technical Education and Apprenticeships Reform

What It Is: For too long, the narrow focus on college education has left the majority of state students behind, but governors can refocus their education systems on family-wage jobs for all. By expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) and apprenticeships, governors will be able to prepare workers for the tech economy's most urgent jobs—building the infrastructure behind artificial intelligence and broadband—while also strengthening their state for the next major private-sector investment. By expanding paid, employer-led pathways in these high-demand fields, the state can give students an alternative to the one-size-fits-all college track, help families avoid unnecessary debt, and ensure public workforce dollars produce real results.

This Executive Order will make career preparation initiatives more accountable by measuring employment, wages, completion, and employer participation—not just enrollment or seat time (the mandatory number of hours to earn a credit or certification). It will reorient education toward work, students toward opportunity, and employers toward the skilled workforce they need.

What It Accomplishes: This Executive Order will align Career and Technical Education (CTE) and apprenticeships with regional labor market demand, high-value career pathways, and measurable employment outcomes. It will expand paid internships, apprenticeships, and employer-led training in high-demand fields; review CTE funding and credentials; publish employment and wage outcomes; and tie incentives to students entering jobs, apprenticeships, or further technical training. The goal is to make CTE a true bridge from high school to self-sufficiency—not a set of disconnected courses or low-value credentials.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Align CTE Programs with Regional Workforce Demand:

- Direct the State Education Agency, Workforce Agency, Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Regional Workforce Boards to review all state-approved CTE programs against regional high-wage, high-demand, high-skill jobs.
- Require each CTE program of study to have documented employer input, regional labor market justification, and work-based learning partners.
- Tie apprenticeships to high-demand fields, prioritizing construction, manufacturing, transportation, health care, information technology, and other middle-skill fields with strong wages and labor shortages.

Prioritize Middle-Skill Pathways over "College-for-All":

- Create paid work-based learning opportunities. Direct agencies to expand paid internships, apprenticeships, and employer-based training for students completing approved CTE programs.
- Build pre-apprenticeships and work-based learning into high school CTE programs so students can begin career pathways before graduation.

Tie Funding and Accountability to Post-Graduation Outcomes:

- Require annual reporting on whether CTE concentrators (students who have completed a specific sequence of courses in a single career pathway) are employed, enrolled in post-secondary training, earning industry credentials, or entering apprenticeships after graduation.
- Direct the state to review industry-recognized credentials and remove or de-prioritize credentials that do not lead to meaningful employment, wage gains, apprenticeship entry, or further technical education.
- Report completion, employment, wages, credential attainment, and employer participation—not just seat time or course enrollment.

Create State-Recognized Apprenticeship Options:

- Establish an industry-recognized apprenticeship pathway overseen by the State Workforce Agency, giving employers more flexibility than the federal Registered Apprenticeship Program.

State Examples:

- Missouri Gov. Mike Kehoe, Executive Order 25-16, Governor's Workforce of the Future Challenge.
- Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Executive Order 19-31, Workforce Education by 2030.

Executive Order: Addressing Benefit Cliffs

What It Is: When safety net recipients work more or earn raises, they can hit a "benefit cliff," where higher gross income leaves them no better off—or even worse off—after lost benefits. These cliffs can discourage work and undermine long-term upward mobility. The safety net should encourage work and upward mobility, not punish families for earning more.

Governors can use their current authority to make the safety net more predictable, work-oriented, and fiscally responsible. Rather than expanding benefits further up the income scale, the goal is to ensure that accepting more hours, a raise, or a promotion always leaves families better off—not trapped by abrupt losses in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, child care assistance, Medicaid, housing assistance, or other benefits.

What It Accomplishes: This is not just about making sure work pays. It is about ensuring that work always makes families more stable, that we promote work, and ultimately that our social welfare system is pro-opportunity. This Executive Order will direct state agencies to identify where public benefits drop off abruptly as families earn more; align eligibility and phase-out rules where possible; and use waivers, pilots, data sharing, and case management to help families move from assistance to work without being penalized simply for earning more. In implementing these reforms, governors can use their authority to ensure that families have the bridge they need to flourish.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Identify the Nature and Scope of the Problem:

- Direct relevant agencies to produce reports on administrative data across major safety net programs to better understand program dynamics, work disincentives, administrative burdens, and potential benefit cliff effects. They should consist of both: (1) annual program exit data, and (2) point-in-time participation data using consistent reference months each year, including household counts, reasons for program exit, benefit levels, earned income levels, household composition, and employment status of the household head, with averages/medians and, where feasible, distributions by decile or other specific-range categories.
- Direct agencies to measure the total number of households exiting annually, the most common reasons for exit ranked by frequency, household benefit amounts and earned income at the time of exit, household size/composition, and employment status of the household head. For point-in-time snapshots each year, states should report these same categories of data for households actively participating in major public assistance programs, including SNAP, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child care assistance, housing assistance, and related means-tested benefits.
- Partner with reputable survey research design firms to deploy safety net population surveys to measure self-reported "intentional earnings reductions" taken in anticipation of cliff effects.

Use Existing State Flexibility to Smooth Benefit Cliffs:

- Using administrative and survey data as a foundation, review how SNAP, child care assistance, TANF, Medicaid, housing assistance, and other programs interact to identify state-specific scenarios in which families are hit with sudden benefit losses when they accept a raise, promotion, or additional hours. State agencies should be directed to identify and pursue existing waiver authorities to align all program phase-outs and smooth cliffs.
- Require more frequent income checks and adjust benefits as earnings rise to ensure benefits taper appropriately.
- Adjust state-set benefits, particularly child care and cash assistance, to make benefit reductions more predictable and gradual.
- Review Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility policies to ensure the SNAP benefit reduction slope complies with federal exit limits.

Deploy a Financial Planning/Community Coaching Intervention Pilot:

- Use TANF reserve funds to launch a pilot to provide financial planning/forecasting interventions, employment support services, and community mentoring focused on overcoming safety net benefit cliffs.

Move Toward a Work First One Door System:

- Take steps, including completing an audit and establishing a task force, to move state agencies toward an integrated safety net in which programs are coordinated, rules are aligned, work is encouraged, and families are not forced to navigate conflicting eligibility rules across multiple agencies.

Seek Federal Waivers to Test Benefit Cliff Reforms:

- Submit waivers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service to modify deduction or benefits for up to 15% of the SNAP caseload—especially for employed, non-elderly, non-disabled participants—to test ways to avoid cliffs.
- Launch a limited demonstration pilot, serving 700 families, to evaluate whether integrated benefit administration, individualized case management with accountability measures, tailored community participation expectations, and transparent gradual benefit reductions produce stronger outcomes than the current system.

State Examples:

- Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, 2026 Welfare Transparency and Accountability Executive Order.
- Utah Navigation and Financial Planning for Self-Reliance Pilot Project.

Executive Order: Building Healthy Families and Communities

What It Is: State policy can reduce barriers to stable, two-parent families, and governors can support marriage and family formation, especially in low-income communities. This is vital because when children can be raised by their married parents, they have substantially better life outcomes, including higher educational attainment, better emotional health, and greater economic well-being. In contrast, children without stable, involved fathers are more vulnerable to depression, drug abuse, and delinquent behavior.

These outcomes extend to parents as well: married adults tend to be healthier, live longer, and have higher incomes. Even just following the "success sequence"—finishing high school, working full time, and marrying before having children—offers a proven pathway for young adults to build stable families and achieve upward mobility. Research has found that 97% of Millennials who follow the sequence avoided poverty. However, when a two-parent family is not possible, state policy can also encourage single-parent households by supporting strong social connections, community assistance organizations, and faith-based relationships.

What It Accomplishes: Under this model, a governor can emphasize the critical need for strong families and communities, educate young citizens about the success sequence and the importance of involved fatherhood, reduce marriage penalties, connect low-income men and women to family-supporting careers and community resources, and ensure all single-parent households are supported.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Emphasize the Success Sequence and Parent Education:

- Use Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to teach the success sequence to all middle school students in public schools.
- Use Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood grants intentionally to engage new and non-custodial parents in parental education curriculums.
- Maximize the use of TANF and other eligible funding to implement home-visiting programs (e.g., the Nurse-Family Partnership, H.A.N.D.S., etc.) while ensuring that the programs engage both the father and the mother.
- Support two-generation programs that have proven successful outcomes and engage the child and both parents.

Reduce Marriage Penalties:

- Commission an audit to identify all marriage penalties in the state tax code and credits. Create a task force to address marriage penalties.
- Eliminate income- and asset-related marriage penalties in the state Medicaid Buy-In/premium assistance program. Marriage penalties currently exist for working individuals with disabilities who qualify for Medicaid through the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.
- Wherever possible, when determining eligibility for federal and state safety net benefits, require agencies to count the income of all members living in the household, including biological and presumed parents, regardless of marital status or whether they are guardians or live-in partners of parents. This does not include the income of children who reside in the residence, which would penalize teens and young adults in low-income households who are building work histories.

Foster Family-Supporting Careers:

- Require state agencies responsible for providing public assistance (including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TANF, Medicaid, child care assistance, etc.); workforce development and support; and education and training programs to collaborate on a Work First One Door pathway to assistance.
- Create uniform identity and income verification standards for all online government assistance programs and use federal data sources for state data matches.
- Engage the business community (chambers, industry associations, trade organizations, etc.) in identifying areas most in need in the state, incentivizing investment in economic development, and helping build or rebuild conditions that support flourishing families and communities.
- Ensure that every work-capable welfare recipient engages in work, training, or the short-term education necessary to provide for their family and build financial stability. After instituting the work engagement requirements of the 1996 welfare reform, the rapid decline in children living in married families came to an abrupt halt.
- Institute an audit to collect performance data on all state or federally funded workforce development or education programs in the state. Focus on outcomes associated with credential attainment, wage gains, and job stability.

Facilitate Public-Private Partnerships:

- Create partnerships with nonprofit organizations that connect families in need to community-based support and employment.
- Ensure that all partners use standardized assessments to track progress and outcomes for individuals in need.

Enforce Child Support:

- Require custodial parents to participate in the child support system as a condition of receiving food assistance, child care assistance, and Medicaid, as they already do for the TANF program. Child support enforcement is both an anti-poverty tool and the best mechanism states have to ensure disengaged non-custodial parents participate in the lives of their children.

State Examples:

- Many states (Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Georgia, and Utah) have run healthy marriage programs. Key to note here is that measurable outcomes may depend on attendance. Participants in Oklahoma City's Family Expectations initiative were about 20% more likely to be together after three years.
- Tennessee used TANF carryover funds to authorize seven large-scale, three-year demonstrations, incorporating a focus on responsible fatherhood. They also used separate state funds to assess these randomized controlled trials.
- Only five states always count the income of live-in partners, and 41 states and Washington, D.C., never count the income of live-in partners. For instance, Virginia and Kansas require agencies to count the income of cohabitating or live-in partners when determining eligibility for child care assistance.
- Governor Sanders launched the 10:33 Initiative pilot program to connect low-income Arkansans with faith and community partners for help. This includes AR LAUNCH, which connects participants to employment opportunities.
- Louisiana audited its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs and found that participant earnings were *lower* after the programs.
- Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, and Mississippi require custodial parents to cooperate with the child support system as a condition of receiving SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, and subsidized child care benefits.
- Iowa and Florida have state initiatives to use resource navigation, strong local partnerships, and a shared case management system to help eligible families move from crisis to stability through one coordinated pathway to support. See Thrive Iowa and Hope Florida.

Executive Order: Family in My Backyard

What It Is: The Family in My Backyard (FIMBY) Executive Order will help families flourish across generations by expanding access to housing they can afford. Too many state and local regulations restrict housing supply, making it harder for families to live near the people, jobs, schools, churches, and support networks that help them thrive. As a result, young families are priced out, older parents are separated from adult children, workers are pushed farther from job opportunities, and caregivers have fewer practical options. By removing unnecessary barriers to housing, the FIMBY Executive Order will expand affordability, strengthen families, support caregiving, and help rebuild the social fabric.

What It Accomplishes: A governor can use executive authority to cut permitting delays, review state regulations, identify underused public land, publish model local ordinances, and reward communities that remove barriers to housing such as starter homes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), townhomes, duplexes, and small-lot family housing. Far from creating new entitlements of subsidies, this Executive Order will ensure the government stops standing in the way of housing families can afford. It will send a clear message that the state is addressing affordability, family formation, intergenerational support, work, caregiving, strong communities, and the ability of ordinary families to live near opportunity.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Audit Zoning and Permitting Barriers:

- Direct the State Housing Agency, the Economic Development Agency, and relevant licensing or code agencies to identify the necessary supply of housing to meet the jobs-to-housing ratio. Then direct agencies to identify state and local rules that block the supply of starter housing options.
- Direct the State Housing Agency to review whether state-administered housing programs create barriers to new buildings.
- Create a Housing Ombudsman Office to review local housing rules that allow subjective denial of otherwise lawful family housing projects.

Create By-Right Policy under State Authority:

- Direct agencies to identify underused state-owned land suitable for small-lot starter homes, townhomes, ADUs, or mixed-income housing near jobs, schools, transit, or public services.
- Direct the State Housing Agency to publish a model ordinance for cities and counties. Key options include: permitting ADUs by-right on residential lots; legalizing lot splits, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhomes, small multiplexes, and by-right housing in commercial, light industrial, and mixed-use areas; pre-approving plans; and reducing parking mandates.

Fast Track Reviews:

- Enable state agencies to establish clear timelines, plain-language checklists, single points of contact, concurrent review where possible, and shot clocks for state permits affecting residential development.
- Publish pre-approved plans for starter homes, ADUs, duplexes, townhomes, and small multifamily buildings.
- Identify state building code provisions, fees, inspection practices, and design standards that disproportionately burden small homes, ADUs, modular homes, manufactured homes, townhomes, and small multifamily buildings, while preserving health and safety protections.

Inventory State Resources and Assets:

- Condition or prioritize discretionary housing, infrastructure, transportation, or community-development grants for jurisdictions that adopt pro-family housing reforms, such as legalizing ADUs, duplexes, and small multifamily housing.
- Enable state Economic Development Agencies to include housing availability, starter-home production, and local land-use flexibility as factors when awarding economic development incentives or supporting major job-creating projects.

State Examples:

- Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, Housing Starts Here Executive Order.
- Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte, Housing Task Force Executive Order, No. 5-2022, on affordable and attainable housing, which identified zoning reform as a priority.
- Washington and Oregon published model ordinances or model codes that cities and counties can use to implement pro-family housing reforms. California also requires local agencies to establish ADU preapproval programs, post preapproved ADU plans online, and approve or deny qualifying detached ADU applications using preapproved plans within 30 days.
- California, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Massachusetts have directed agencies or launched state initiatives to identify and advance underused state-owned land for housing. California Gov. Gavin Newsom's Executive Order N-06-19 directed the state to identify and prioritize excess state-owned property for affordable housing. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore's Executive Order 01.01.2025.19 directed agencies to identify surplus state-owned land appropriate for housing and prioritize affordable housing on land owned by the Department of Transportation. North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein's Executive Order No. 36 directed the Department of Administration to evaluate underused state-owned properties for housing development or amenities. New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill's Executive Order No. 17 directed a review of state-owned land and requested recommendations for developing unused and surplus property into housing. And Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey's State Land for Homes initiative advances underused state-owned land for new housing.

- Texas, Florida, and California impose permitting "shot clocks" for residential development. Texas requires local authorities to approve, conditionally approve, or disapprove subdivision plats within 30 days. Florida requires local governments to act on building permits and residential and multifamily permits within 10 to 60 business days. And California requires local agencies to complete post-entitlement housing permit review within 30 to 60 business days.
- Massachusetts, Colorado, and Utah condition housing resources for jurisdictions that adopt pro-housing reforms. Massachusetts makes noncompliant MBTA communities (cities and towns required by state law to allow multifamily housing to be built "as of right" in designated zones) ineligible for certain discretionary grants. Colorado requires local governments to implement fast-track review for affordable housing projects to remain eligible for Proposition 123 funding. And Utah requires fixed-guideway transit cities to adopt Station Area Plans and update zoning.

Executive Order: Expanding Affordable Child Care

What It Is: Governors can use this Executive Order to strategically lower the cost of child care for working, low-income families in their state while expanding its availability to other families. Since 1990, the cost of day care and preschool has increased at more than double the overall inflation rate, rising more rapidly than medical care, rent, or food. Of the 1.4 million children the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act served in federal fiscal year 2022, 77% attended child care centers, the most expensive option for care. This happened despite more than half of parents preferring informal child care arrangements, even if formal care was free and conveniently located. The data underscores that all households, regardless of income level, value flexibility and self-direction, not just access to subsidized day care. Innovative reforms can expand family-directed assistance to more low-income working households.

What It Accomplishes: Governors can lead a bold modernization of state child care subsidies for low-income working families by intentionally expanding the affordability, availability, and flexibility of child care voucher funds; ensuring program integrity; solving marriage penalties; and addressing benefit cliffs. At the same time, an integrated system of workforce and safety net services will more effectively help the most vulnerable citizens escape poverty through targeted support and work opportunities that offer a sense of dignity and self-sufficiency. In advancing these solutions, governors will strengthen their state workforce and expand economic opportunity for all families.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Expand Affordability and Availability:

- Direct the state's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) agency or create a task force to conduct a regulatory review to consider ways to lower child care costs for providers without compromising safety and quality.
- Direct the state's CCAP agency to incentivize lower-cost child care options by prioritizing access to home and relative care.
- Request a federal waiver that will allow states to consider the cost of care as part of their CCAP sliding fee scale to incorporate price competition incentives and create a sliding fee schedule that rewards parents for choosing lower-cost settings.
- Create education savings accounts for low-income families instead of direct-to-day care vouchers. Only 1% of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) families receive cash certificates. The rest of the CCDBG child care distributions are via vouchers sent directly to day care centers.

- Submit a Combined Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan instead of a Unified WIOA State Plan. The plan should require research and data collection on state models for coordinating and fully integrating workforce, social services, education, child care, and health care programs to achieve improved outcomes.
- Direct the state's CCAP agency to leverage private-public partnerships with employers to support their workforce. Define, create, and implement a demonstration project to fully use public-private partnerships to expand supply and leverage private resources.

Increase Program Integrity:

- Require payment for services based on actual services provided, which should be informed by attendance, age group, setting, and rate category. Prevent providers from charging the client or billing the state for services that are not supported by attendance.
- Implement a master client index to prevent the authorization of multiple payments for services for a period in which children are shared between parents.
- Verify, through trusted and credible sources, all information associated with eligibility.

Solve Marriage Penalties:

- Define a household by all members living at the address, including biological, adoptive, foster, and putative parents, regardless of marital status.[1]
- Hold absent parents accountable for their children. The collection of child support decreases poverty and increases the connection to children. Incorporate child support enforcement requirements for child care, as required by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, including establishing paternity.

Remove Upward Mobility Disincentives (i.e., Benefit Cliffs):

- Eliminate all income deductions from eligibility determinations.
- Modify program income limits to address changes to deductions.
- Use a benefit reduction rate to transition families to private care when income increases.

State Examples:

- Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, "Improving Policies and Addressing Regulatory Barriers to Grow and Support Tennessee's Child Care Industry," January 2025.

- Hawaii has 100% of CCDF distributions through cash payments available on an EBT card, by transmission directly to bank accounts, or to a child care provider chosen by the family.

- Wisconsin includes child care in its WIOA Combined State Plan.

[1] Only five states always count the income of live-in partners, and 41 states and Washington, D.C., never count the income of live-in partners. See Urban Institute, CCDF Policies Database.

- Idaho and Wisconsin require child support enforcement, including establishing paternity, to receive child care. See Idaho Child Care Program; Idaho Admin. Code r. 16.06.12.103, "Cooperation in Establishment of Paternity and Obtaining Support"; and Wisconsin Shares Handbook.
- Michigan has a Tri-Share Child Care public-private partnership offering child care services. "MI Tri-Share," Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential.

Other Sources:

- Anna Claire Flowers, Vincent Geloso, Ricky Feir, and Samuel Tipka, "State Childcare Regulations Index 2026," Archbridge Institute, February 3, 2026.

Executive Order: Anti-Fraud and Program Integrity

What It Is: This Executive Order will empower governors to ensure that taxpayer-funded programs serve the people they were created to help. Across safety net, workforce, and education programs, weak eligibility checks, fragmented data systems, inconsistent reporting, and limited follow-up have allowed improper payments, duplicative benefits, and ineffective spending to persist, even as eligible claimants have sometimes struggled to receive benefits in a timely fashion. Improper payments have been especially problematic when states administer federally funded benefits like food stamps and emergency unemployment checks.

What It Accomplishes: Governors should pursue a two-pronged approach to enabling state agencies to verify eligibility before payment, use cross-program data matching, strengthen identity verification, coordinate case management, enforce work and participation requirements, and recover improper payments. First, for state-funded benefits under the governor's direct control, such reforms should be universal and mandatory. And second, for federally funded benefits administered by the state, reforms should also be mandatory and universal to the degree permitted by federal law. These changes will strengthen the safety net for families by protecting scarce resources, improving public trust, and ensuring that public dollars are tied to real outcomes such as work, job preparation, self-sufficiency, and family stability.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Engage Gubernatorial Oversight:

- Clarify which programs to investigate, the leadership of the affected agencies, deadlines for audit reports, taskforce creation, and reform implementation.
- Order an audit of safety net enrollment to identify the highest-risk program populations among beneficiaries, applicants, and providers. The assessment of beneficiaries and applicants should include a review of their residency, citizenship, incarcerations, employment, earnings, and assets. It should also consider possible digital risk, evidence of past fraud attempts, synthetic identities, and dual enrollment. Provider assessment should consider business owner identity and any active business or nonobvious relationship registrations; past history of sanctions, felonies, or bankruptcies; annual recertification reviews for high-risk categories; and history of tax payments and patterns.
- Order an audit on the effectiveness of safety net programs. This should include a review of post-exit employment and earnings outcomes for all safety net, workforce, and education programs.
- Require an audit to identify state administrative flexibility options. This should include sunsetting program expansion options or waivers that unnecessarily add vulnerabilities, particularly those that rely on self-attested eligibility or identity data.

Verify Identity:

- Direct an audit to identify vulnerabilities or gaps in technology systems, data validation, and business processes, particularly around application, onboarding, work-search, and renewal processes for recipients and providers. The audit report should assess current vulnerabilities in: the initial application (identity and eligibility), recertification, and disqualification processes; program integrity, including the work of the fraud control unit, eligibility staffing, estimated cost per investigation, investigative tools, and overpayment establishment and recovery; and the addition of sanctioned individuals and businesses to DoNotPay.
- Institute a master index number across all safety net, workforce, and education programs.
- Verify applicants' identities, using at least one valid federal or state government-issued ID, before benefits are paid.
- Use data matching to detect ineligible claims before they are paid. States can do this by cross-checking claimants against tools such as the Department of Labor's Integrity Data Hub, the National Directory of New Hires, the State Information Data Exchange System, the Social Security Administration's prisoner data, and the Death Master File.

Prevent Fraud:

- End "pay and chase." Benefits should not be paid first and verified later; identity and eligibility should be confirmed before payment.
- Apply for an updated federal Cost Allocation Model that allows the state to braid administrative matches across all safety net, workforce, and education programs.
- Invest in best-in-class technology modernization across all safety net, workforce, and education programs.

Strengthen Work-Search Requirements:

- Require all work-capable claimants and safety net recipients to register for employment services, keep weekly work-search records, and submit those records for mandatory state verification.

State Examples:

- Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, 2026 Welfare Transparency and Accountability Executive Order.
- Massachusetts Acting Gov. Timothy Murray, 2011 Anti-Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Task Force Executive Order, No. 528.
- Unemployment Insurance Integrity Data Hub, which includes participant information from all 50 states.
- Missouri conducts ongoing eligibility verification across the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and child care assistance at least quarterly.

Executive Order: Ensure Child Safety and Permanency

What It Is: Governors must ensure that all children in their state, particularly the most vulnerable, are safe and find a permanent home. The first rule of state child protection is to recognize serious threats of harm and intervene before tragedy occurs. Too many children are not protected from danger, even when state agencies are in contact with the family. In 2020 alone, approximately 1,750 children across the nation died from abuse and neglect. In Kentucky, independent investigations found that over two-thirds of the children who died or almost died were in homes that were in contact with the state child welfare agency. In Pennsylvania, that number was 94% of child deaths and near deaths. Once children enter foster care, they spend 23 months on average in care, and those who remain longer experience far more instability. Among children in care for two years or longer, 59% have three or more placements. Governors can enact practical reforms that invest in early risk detection, equip their frontline workers, hold their agencies accountable, and ultimately ensure vulnerable children find permanent homes.

What It Accomplishes: Governors must guarantee that protecting the safety of any child in danger of experiencing abuse and neglect is a central focus. Governors can transform their child protection system so it better identifies credible threats of harm, prioritizes the highest-risk cases, and responds to the underlying conditions that place children at risk. They can equip their frontline workers with the tools, protocols, and decision supports needed to consistently identify cases that require an urgent response. Child protection agencies exercise extraordinary authority in the lives of families. Governors can match that authority with transparency, independent oversight, and a commitment to examining failures openly. These actions will improve this vital protective system so every child has a safe, permanent family.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Strengthen Early Risk Detection in Child Protection:

- Implement predictive risk modeling and structured decision tools to assist hotline screeners.
- Establish clear priority response levels so the most urgent cases receive immediate attention and clear plans of safe care, particularly for fentanyl exposure, opioid use, and mental health risks affecting parenting capacity.
- Clarify the legal definition of and testing for emerging threats such as fentanyl exposure.

Enable Frontline Excellence:

- Create clear and trackable definitions of abuse and neglect.
- Modernize case documentation and evidence collection by using technology to improve visibility into case progress and strengthen supervisory capacity.
- Verify timely face-to-face contact in child protection investigations with technology.
- Expand the use of telehealth to connect rural areas with trained specialists.
- Require specialized forensic interview training for investigators handling sexual abuse cases and designated sexual abuse care teams through partnerships with hospitals, clinics, and child advocacy centers. Ensure children receive sexual abuse medical exams within 72 hours when appropriate.

Require Transparency and Accountability:

- Create a State Ombudsman Office and ensure it has the appropriate authority and a direct connection to technology systems and case information for real-time reviews.
- Establish a process for public notification of child maltreatment fatalities, including public notification of de-identified case reviews.
- Integrate child protection data with vital records systems to ensure deaths are accurately identified and reviewed.
- Strengthen multidisciplinary child death review processes for child neglect and abuse fatalities.
- Permit child welfare agencies to publicly provide factual information about their actions when a child welfare case has already been publicly identified through media coverage, litigation, or public statements, ensuring transparency, accountability, and an accurate public understanding of agency decisions.

Ensure Children Are Protected in Care by Accelerating the Path to Home:

- Require child welfare agencies to quickly and diligently search for relatives, extended family, and other adults with a significant relationship to a child entering foster care—using interviews, records searches, court reporting, and ongoing efforts—until permanency is achieved. This search should favor initial placement with non-custodial biological parents, relatives, or significant adults when safe and in the child's best interest. However, the Executive Order should also create protections for young children already bonded to caregivers.
- Require all children to have legal representation. Children with legal representation exit foster care and achieve permanency up to 3.5 times faster.
- Require all children in care to have photo IDs. An estimated 18,000 American children will disappear annually. And according to the FBI, more than half of these trafficked children were in the care of social services. Without a current photo ID, finding children is an even more difficult task.
- Actively seek out public-private engagement with nonprofit partners to provide permanency for children, particularly those who are 8 years old and older, are in sibling groups, have been in foster care more than 27 months, and have disabilities.

State Examples:

- The North Carolina legislature's Dominique Moody Act, Senate Bill 280, authorizes predictive risk modeling as a child safety tool.
- The Virginia Office of the Children's Ombudsman has statutory authority to receive complaints involving children alleged to have been abused or neglected, children receiving support from Child Protective Services, children in foster care, and children awaiting adoption.
- Louisiana requires its Department of Children & Family Services to notify the State Child Ombudsman when a child fatality or near fatality is the subject of a child abuse or neglect investigation; requires the Ombudsman to notify specified lawmakers; and authorizes the Ombudsman to publish reports, findings, recommendations, and aggregate or de-identified data while protecting confidential and identifying information.
- Arizona passed Senate Bill 1473, which requires the Department of Child Safety and the courts to treat certain events involving a substance-exposed infant as an aggravating circumstance and move quickly toward termination proceedings.
- Rhode Island has a Child Advocate Child Fatality Review Panel.
- Colorado and Hawaii consider "neglect identifiers," specific warning signs of neglect that help authorities recognize red flags when trying to uncover child neglect.
- Arizona Senate Bill 1391 requires legal representation for all children in foster care.
- Louisiana's and Arizona's Family Search & Stability Acts: Louisiana Senate Bill 143 (enacted as Act No. 350 of the 2021 Regular Session) and Arizona House Bill 2035 of 2026.

Executive Order: Empowering People with Disabilities

What It Is: Approximately 100 million Americans either have a disability or care for someone who does. And about half of Americans with disabilities receive some form of government assistance. It has been one generation since the federal Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, bringing more people with disabilities into the community, education system, and workforce. Unfortunately, our social safety net policies have not been updated to reflect this generational change. While the social safety net is at least partially federally funded, there is wide latitude for states to take advantage of flexibilities to create reforms that allow people with disabilities to receive better care, work, and save for the future.

What It Accomplishes: The proposed reforms in this Executive Order can impact about a third of a state's population of people with disabilities and the caregiving workforce that often makes poverty-level wages. These reforms will allow the most vulnerable people in a state to receive the care they need. The changes will also empower people with disabilities to work, save, and plan for the future through tools like Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) 529 Savings Accounts, reforms to Medicaid, and the guarantee that government dollars are prioritized for those most in need.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Audit the Existing Processes Around State Medicaid Waiver Participants to Prioritize High-Need Individuals on the Waitlist:

- Conduct an audit to consider ways to prioritize waitlist slots, screen participants, uncover administrative duplications, provide oversight of the eligibility process, and understand caregiving workforce gaps. Create a tiered waiver system tied to need and crisis level.
- Explore ways to increase wages for the paid caregiving workforce.

Create Public Transparency with the Medicaid Waitlist and Providers Through Technology:

- Ensure that families and individuals can securely access up-to-date information about their position on the waiver waitlist.
- Create a portal that allows users to confirm the accuracy of their personal and application information and make necessary updates, reducing errors and ensuring efficient processing.
- Verify and update care providers' information and rates in a publicly accessible manner.

Align Vocational Rehabilitation Supports with ABLE Accounts:

- Allow state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) financial support, scholarships, and work-related expense funding to be delivered through or coordinated with ABLE Accounts. This will provide states with a flexible, consumer-centered tool to modernize VR service delivery.

Raise or Eliminate Asset and Income Limits in Medicaid Buy-In Programs:

- Ensure that Medicaid Buy-In programs encourage people with disabilities to work by adjusting or removing asset and income limits. Keeping the allowable income and asset limits low will restrict the hours and wages someone can accept to maintain Medicaid coverage for things like caregiving or expensive medical equipment that employer-sponsored plans do not cover.

Establish a State Self-Directed Medicaid Home- and Community-Based Services Personal Account Demonstration Project:

- In lieu of establishing another waiver and working through years of bureaucracy, launch a demonstration project to allocate Medicaid funds directly to eligible recipients' (with disabilities) ABLE Accounts (operated by the treasurer) and allow flexibility for the individual to choose the right mix of care providers for their needs. Working directly with individuals with disabilities and their families lessens the need for federal and state government bureaucracy and administrative bloat. Foundations, charitable entities, or employers could also contribute to these accounts, similar to the approach with a Health Savings Account.

Deposit Supplemental Security Income Payments to Foster Youth into ABLE Accounts for Adulthood:

- Directly deposit Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments into a disabled foster youth's ABLE Account, and set them up for adulthood by offering targeted financial education and practical support. Foster youth frequently struggle with credit issues, debt, and a lack of financial knowledge, and this will help them save for their education, housing, transportation, or other essentials as they become adults. It is also noteworthy that in at least 47 states and Washington, D.C., foster care agencies are currently combing through their case files to find kids entitled to these SSI benefits, and then applying to Social Security to become each child's financial representative. Once approved, the agencies take the money, almost always without notifying the children, their loved ones, or lawyers.

Empower Families to Save for the Future When Their Child Is Born with a Disability:

- Allow the state's ABLE administrator or treasurer access to vital statistics so that when a baby is born with a disability, the family gets immediate education on how to save for the future through ABLE Accounts.

State Examples:

- Kansas's ABLE foster youth pilot and Arizona's personal account program for foster youth.
- Kansas's ABLE Account expansions.
- TennCare for Working Individuals with Disabilities Act, Senate Bill 2791.
- Louisiana's tiered Medicaid waitlist system.
- Former Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin's Right Help, Right Now waitlist reduction.

Executive Order: Rural Health Renewal

What It Is: The One Big Beautiful Bill created the Rural Health Transformation (RHT) Fund: $50 billion, distributed over five years, with $10 billion available annually from federal fiscal year (FY) 2026 through FY 2030. Most importantly, governors should now ensure that RHT funds do not become a handout for hospitals. New governors should take an active role in the distribution of RHT funds to transform the current system and build a durable rural health system that continues after the funds expire. In doing so, the state should develop a rural workforce pipeline, target funds to truly rural health care providers, test alternate models to preserve essential care, expand telehealth and regional referral networks, and remove barriers. The true test should be whether rural residents have faster access to essential care after the federal funding expires.

What It Accomplishes: By signing this Executive Order, a new governor will implement reforms to transform a temporary federal grant program into a self-sustaining rural health renewal. The Order will reorient state workforce development toward rural patients, repeal anti-competitive barriers to care, revolutionize outdated modes of health care provision, and ensure positive outcomes for rural citizens.

What Should Be Included in the Executive Order:

Expand Workforce Supply:

- Expand the state scope-of-practice. Let nurse practitioners, physician associates, pharmacists, mental health professionals, and other licensed providers practice all the specific procedures, actions, and processes allowed under their license.
- Expand the rural workforce by directing state Medicaid, social services, workforce development, higher education, and economic development agencies to focus on self-sustaining rural health care in their education, workforce services, and training efforts.
- Incentivize health care students to complete rural clinical rotations.

Repeal Anti-Competitive Barriers:

- Repeal certificate-of-need laws, facility restrictions, and other rules that limit new entrants, new services, or lower-cost care models.

Track Accountability:

- Require every RHT grant or payment stream to report on outcomes, not just spending. Metrics should include emergency assistance availability, access to obstetricians, travel time, behavioral health appointments, primary care capacity, EMS response capacity, hospital transfer times, rural provider recruitment, and avoidable hospitalizations.

Preserve Essential Care:

- Require rural hospitals to create new operating models rather than recreating every urban specialty service. Maintaining access to this care is essential, but rural hospitals often lose money because they must keep 24/7 emergency care and certain other services—like obstetric care—available despite low patient volume.
- Use the RHT Fund to test operating and payment models that recognize fixed costs, and incorporate other essential populations who prefer to live in a home or community setting, including aging people, individuals with disabilities, and those with severe mental illnesses.

State Examples:

- Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, Executive Order JML 26-032.
- Idaho Gov. Brad Little, Executive Order 2025-08.
- Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, Executive Order No. 741.

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