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## Another new face!

**We're excited to announce a great new addition to the Arise staff!**

Turn to Page 3 to learn about our new communications associate, Matt Okarmus.

## The latest on Medicaid

**Thank you for fighting Alabama Medicaid's catch-22 "work requirement" plan for parents in deep poverty.** We expect Medicaid to submit a revised proposal to the federal government by early July. We'll share details and next steps via email and in future newsletters.

## Upcoming events

**July 9 & Aug. 13, Fairhope** – Baldwin County Arise meeting, Fairhope Friends Meeting House, 6 p.m.

**July 11, Anniston** – Arise listening session, Anniston City Meeting Center, noon.

**July 19, Florence** – Arise listening session on Medicaid changes, Thrive Alabama, 11 a.m.

**July 27** – Deadline for Arise member groups to submit proposals for 2019 issue priorities.

**Aug. 14, Mobile** – Mobile County Arise meeting, Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, 6 p.m.

**Sept. 8, Montgomery** – Annual meeting, Aldersgate United Methodist Church, 2:30 a.m.

**Oct. 13, Montgomery** – Arise's 30th anniversary celebration, Aldersgate UMC, 5 p.m.

## Forrister retiring after 27 years at Arise **Goodbye and thank you, Kimble**

By *Chris Sanders, communications director*

**"I mean, what does Arise even look like without Kimble?"** one of my coworkers asked earlier this year. It'd been a topic of discussion around the office for a few years, ever since our executive director, Kimble Forrister, attached a specific date to his years of warnings that he would, in fact, retire one day. Now, perhaps sooner than any of us expected, that day is at hand.

**Kimble will go down in our state's history for building Arise into a moral force for justice and opportunity for all Alabamians.** For decades, he has been a leading light in statewide campaigns to restore balance to Alabama's upside-down tax system, to improve education and housing, to invest in health care and public transportation and other services that help people get ahead. As *The Anniston Star* wrote, "There may be no Alabamian alive today who has done more to better the living conditions for his fellow man in the last quarter-century." (See Page 4.)

**For Arise, Kimble's legacy is even more foundational.** When he first came to the organization, it was still a small, young coalition of congregations and community groups struggling to make a name for itself. Under his leadership, we developed into a respected, well-known voice – in the media and in the halls of government – for the policy concerns of low-income Alabamians. The number of Arise member groups tripled, and the



*Kimble Forrister is retiring June 30 after 27 years as Arise's first executive director. He will continue working as a part-time adviser for the next few months to help ease the transition to new director Robyn Hyden and to share institutional memory with a new generation of Arise staff.*

number of individual members increased at an even faster pace. The staff expanded from two to 15. With that growth came policy successes, like an increase in Alabama's state income tax threshold, passage of a landlord-tenant law and creation of state trust funds for housing and transportation. And it all happened with a collaborative, selfless spirit that permeated the organizational culture,

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## A few words from Kimble

By Kimble Forrister,  
executive director

**As I write these words, I don't quite have the script for my exit.** I suppose I'd better not just slip out the door. In fact, Robyn Hyden and I will have a fair amount of overlap, including a directors' meeting in Detroit and a handoff of details (the secret handshake, the staff parking space map). Of course, she already knows Arise deeply inside and out.

**It's been tricky to maneuver this "public face of Arise" thing.** When I interviewed for the job, I was told we needed that public face for TV. I agreed, even though it went against my organizer training, which said local leaders should talk to reporters. Later, it made sense for staff experts to act as public faces, too. Ideally, we want you, our members, to be the story – as in, "Hundreds of people from across Alabama swarmed the State House today to send a message..."

**Robyn will bring a fresh public face and a gift for cooperation.** As more young folks catch the vision and work with longtime advocates, Arise can surge forward and build influence with lawmakers who represent us, not powerful interests. Growing Arise doesn't mean elbowing out other groups; we need all the partners we can get! But to stand strong as the multi-issue coalition that fights systemic causes of poverty, we must grow to scale, change the conversation and effect consequential change.

**I'll miss this slim column of the newsletter.** I hope these one-sided chats have conveyed that Arise is all about relationships, and that your participation in state decisions ought to be the most natural thing in the world. For Alabama's 200th anniversary, let's claim our legacy: a government accountable to its people.

Yours in peace and hope,

## Bad House plan would cut food aid for millions Senate Farm Bill would guard SNAP

By Carol Gundlach, policy analyst

**Americans across the political spectrum have long agreed on the importance of reducing hunger in our country.** But on June 21, by only two votes, the U.S. House passed a Farm Bill reauthorization that would take food off the tables of as many as 2 million hungry people. It would do this by imposing draconian – and unworkable – employment and training requirements on most food assistance recipients while cutting assistance for those unable to comply.

**The U.S. Senate's bipartisan Farm Bill offers a more hopeful vision.** It would strengthen the Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, and offer more robust job training services for SNAP participants. The Senate passed its version 86-11 on June 28. Both of Alabama's U.S. senators – Doug Jones and Richard Shelby – voted "yes."

**SNAP helps more than 40 million Americans make ends meet.** It lifts more than 8 million families out of poverty each year, including 195,000 Alabamians. In Alabama alone, SNAP benefits are spent in more than 5,000 stores and contribute \$1.3 billion a year to the state economy.

**The House's punitive Farm Bill tries to solve problems that don't exist.** More than half of all adult SNAP participants without a disability are working – often in retail, construction and other jobs with low wages, irregular or seasonal hours, and few benefits. The House bill would require nearly all adult participants, including those with very young children and jobless people in their 50s, to work a minimum number of hours to receive food aid.

**Participants who could not prove they worked enough hours could be denied SNAP for one year or longer.** If parents lose food assistance because

they can't find a job or if their work hours fall below the arbitrary minimum, children would be deprived of nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

**By contrast, the Senate Farm Bill would strengthen SNAP** and expand employment and training programs for unemployed and low-wage SNAP participants. It also would encourage states to target those activities to the needs of local businesses and prioritize those services for people facing barriers to employment, including older workers, homeless people, people with disabilities, and people exiting prisons.

### Two different visions for food assistance

#### The House bill would:

- Require nearly all adult participants to work a minimum number of hours to receive food assistance.
- Deny SNAP for a year or more to participants who can't prove they worked enough hours.

#### The Senate bill would:

- Strengthen SNAP and avoid new punitive work requirements.
- Expand employment and training programs for SNAP participants.
- Encourage states to target training activities to local businesses' needs and prioritize those services for people facing barriers like age, disability or homelessness.

**Alabama's congressional delegation plays an important role in Farm Bill reauthorization.** Arise joined other advocates in urging Jones and Shelby to vote for the Senate Farm Bill and to oppose the House's harmful provisions when the two bills are reconciled. Alabamians are caring people, and we have a shared responsibility to keep our neighbors from going hungry. We encourage Arise members to share their thoughts on SNAP with their members of Congress and to watch for our email alerts on the Farm Bill this summer.

# Welcome to Arise, Matt!



Matt Okarmus  
Communications associate

Please help us welcome **Matt Okarmus!** Matt will be our new communications associate, working with communications director Chris Sanders to expand our digital, storytelling and visual activities. He came to Arise after spending eight years in print and digital media, having previously worked with the *Montgomery Advertiser* and the *Opelika-Auburn News*. After growing up in Alabama's Wiregrass

area, Matt attended Auburn University and earned a B.A. in journalism.

**Matt's passion for telling people's stories is what drew him to journalism,** and he aims to bring that same enthusiasm to the communications associate role at Arise. He and his wife are looking forward to being back in Montgomery, so be sure to say hi if you see them at a Biscuits game!

## A note from Brenda



By Brenda Boman,  
development director

**We learned recently of the death of Saradell Crawford,** a dear and loyal friend. By the time I joined

the Arise staff in 2005, Saradell had been a member for nearly a decade. Even though she and her husband had relocated, Saradell continued to care about low-income Alabamians, as evidenced by the envelopes with a San Antonio postmark that showed up in the Arise mailbox month after month.

**Those \$25 checks were more than monetary contributions.** They represented Saradell's confidence in Arise and her hope that our work would bring much-needed changes to Alabama. When we achieved significant wins in 2006 with passage of a landlord-tenant bill and tax reform legislation, Saradell enclosed a note expressing her gratitude, adding, "We feel privileged to play a small role in your good work."

**Later that year, when we were ready to offer members the option to make monthly contributions electronically, I called Saradell.** She agreed to be our first electronic fund transfer donor. She also allowed me to tell her story in our annual report, explaining how EFTs make it easier to give and also add financial stability for nonprofits.

**Today, recurring gifts account for nearly 20 percent of our member giving.** While we are always grateful to those who still send monthly checks, the big influx comes with electronic transfers. We now have 83 members who give through EFTs and another 58 who make recurring online donations. And it all started with Saradell.

**If you would like to follow Saradell's example, click the Donate button at [arisecitizens.org](http://arisecitizens.org).** You can sign up for a recurring monthly gift to be charged to your credit card. Or you can print the EFT form for your gift to come out of your checking account each month.

## Opponents seek repeal via Congress, courts ACA threats remain active this year

By Jim Carnes, policy director

**Health advocates are gearing up for a reprise of last summer's successful defense of the Affordable Care Act (ACA).** A two-pronged assault on the 2010 law, which brought coverage to about 22 million Americans, is playing out in both Congress and the courts.

**Prominent conservatives on June 19 released a new repeal proposal that largely mirrors the 2017 Graham-Cassidy plan.** It would borrow Graham-Cassidy's central provisions by eliminating both Medicaid expansion and Marketplace premium subsidies. In their place, the proposal would give states a new health care block grant that would result in large coverage losses, according to the Congressional Budget Office's analysis of a similar plan. The block grant would allow states to reduce existing health funding and devastate Medicaid's ability to respond to higher demand caused by economic recessions, natural disasters or disease outbreaks.

**Perhaps the plan's least popular provision** is its elimination of key protections for people with pre-existing conditions. While it's unclear whether insurers would be able to link premium costs to health status, the plan would

repeal the essential health benefits requirement that guarantees coverage for maternity services, prescription drugs and treatment for mental health and substance use.

**The latest court challenge to the ACA poses a similar threat.** Nineteen states, including Alabama, have joined a Texas lawsuit that seeks to overturn the ACA. It argues that Congress' reduction of the individual mandate tax penalty to \$0, effective in 2019, undermines the premise that the mandate is a tax, as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2012. By proponents' reasoning, the mandate is thus unconstitutional. They also argue that without the mandate, the law cannot "operate as Congress intended."

**A strong case can be made that Congress intended the pre-existing conditions ban and other protections to stand alone,** but Attorney General Jeff Sessions has decided not to make that case. Sessions announced June 7 that the U.S. Justice Department won't defend the ACA in the Texas suit, leaving that task to a handful of state attorneys general. An anti-ACA ruling would leave tens of millions of Americans with chronic illnesses and disabilities once again at risk of losing coverage just because they got sick.

# Anniston Star: A man's mission to aid Alabama's poor



consider myriad ways the state should better assist our fellow man.

**Under Forrister, Arise has continually argued that Alabama should not tax groceries** – a regressive tax that disproportionately affects low-income residents. Under Forrister, Arise has championed the need to replace our bloated 1901 state Constitution with a governing document that doesn't discriminate or overload political power with a gilded few.

**Under Forrister, Arise has fought to reform the state's upside-down tax system**, to reform the state's death-penalty policies, to expand Medicaid for thousands more Alabamians, and to adequately fund health care, child care and public education. And under Forrister, Arise has advocated for fair housing practices that allow low-income Alabamians a chance at a better and more sustainable life.

**There may be no Alabamian alive today who has done more to better the living conditions for his fellow man in the last quarter-century than Kimble Forrister.** He has shown Alabama the path forward, and it's up to us to take his guidance. We wish him restful times in his retirement and look forward to the day when our state isn't so dismissive of its low-income residents and their needs.

*This editorial paying tribute to Arise executive director Kimble Forrister first appeared in the June 1 edition of The Anniston Star. It is reprinted here with permission.*

*Arise executive director Kimble Forrister urges Alabama legislators to end the state's grocery tax during a 2012 rally outside the State House in Montgomery. For 27 years, Kimble has worked tirelessly to build support for a state tax system that stops taxing struggling Alabamians deeper into poverty and that raises enough revenue for needed investments in education, health care, housing, transportation and other services to help everyday families get ahead. He has built Arise from a fledgling coalition of a few dozen churches and community groups into a respected statewide force for moral justice that has helped improve education, health care, housing, taxes and economic opportunity for millions of Alabamians with low incomes.*

**Alabama, Arise Citizens' Policy Project says, is "a state that by many measures is the worst place for poor people to live in the United States."** Boiled down, that is why that organization exists – to advocate for low-income Alabamians, an often-marginalized demographic that rarely is represented well on the Statehouse floor.

**Kimble Forrister has been the voice for those Alabamians as long as most of us can remember.** Alabama Arise began in 1994 as a nonpartisan coalition

of community groups, congregations and people who wanted to help our state's low-income residents. Forrister is the only executive director Alabama Arise has had. Next month, after 27 years as the public defender of the interests of low-income Alabamians, Forrister is retiring. He'll be replaced by Robyn Hyden, formerly of United Way of Central Alabama.

**Those of us who have supported Arise's legislative advocacy for Alabama's poor** will always feel Forrister's guiding hand when we

## Thank you, Kimble

*[Continued from Page 1]*

ensuring that "Arise after Kimble" will carry forward that essential spirit.

**Kimble isn't gone from Arise quite yet.** He'll remain as a part-time adviser for a few months to ease the transition, and he'll be honored at Arise's 30th

anniversary celebration in October. In the long term, he plans to travel with his wife, Calli, and to spend more time with his children, Clare, Ned and Sarah Alice; and his grandson, Keys. More than one colleague has urged Kimble to write that book he's talked about for years. And given that he's a huge film guy, we expect him to spend plenty of time at the Capri Theatre in Montgomery.

**"I'm planning for this to be a real retirement," Kimble told me this week.** At the time, he was packing up decades' worth of memories, while also keeping an eye on the Farm Bill and compiling a monthly financial report for the board – giving Arise his all up to the very last moment. Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing Kimble would have expected nothing different.