FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACTS

Monday, November 8, 2021 See chart below

**BROAD COALITION CALLS FOR**

**INVESTMENT IN UTAH’S FUTURE, NOT TAX CUTS, DOCUMENTS $5.2 BILLION IN URGENT UNMET NEEDS**

Salt Lake City – On Monday, November 8, 2021 on the steps of the Utah Capitol, a broad and diverse coalition of advocates for the poor, for disabled Utahns, for education, health care, clean air, and a variety of other popular Utah priorities held a press conference calling on the Utah Legislature to avoid cutting taxes until it has developed a comprehensive plan to address Utahns’ top concerns by investing in Utah’s future.

Following nearly two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Utah is fortunate to have achieved a more rapid economic recovery than nearly every other state. Utah has also received billions in federal assistance that have padded state revenues – but only temporarily. It is expected that the Governor and Legislature will have at least **$2.5 billion in new revenues** to appropriate in the 2022 General Session of the Utah Legislature.

This has led some to say that Utah is “[swimming in money](https://kutv.com/news/local/utah-swimming-in-money-pitch-for-big-state-income-tax-cut)” and should cut the state income tax rate from 4.95 to 4.5%, a tax break of $600 million (that mostly benefits upper income families rather than Utahns in need). This tax break would be over and above the roughly $3.5 billion that the Legislature has already cut from annual revenues in recent decades (see <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2021/pdf/00003683.pdf> slide #3).

In response, today the Invest in Utah’s Future coalition presented a list of **urgent unmet needs amounting to $5.2 billion, more than double the amount of the expected new revenues.**

The advocates also pointed out that, according to recent reports from the [Utah State Tax Commission](https://le.utah.gov/interim/2019/pdf/00003720.pdf) and the [Utah Foundation](https://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/utah-priority-no-2-state-taxes-and-spending/), taxes in Utah are the lowest that they have been in decades, following repeated rounds of tax cutting. “We understand that tax cuts are popular, but we’ve reached the point where we must ask ourselves: Are we, as the current generation of Utahns, meeting our responsibility, as earlier generations did, to set aside sufficient resources every year to invest in our children, in our future, in the foundations of the next generation’s prosperity and quality of life?” said Matthew Weinstein of Voices for Utah Children.

Speakers also referenced the recent [public opinion survey](https://www.deseret.com/utah/2021/10/31/22749028/utah-budget-surplus-should-be-spent-on-education-poll-says-tax-cuts-party-lines) by the Deseret News and Hinckley Institute that found that only 27% of Utahns support tax cutting over investing in Utah’s future, consistent with [other polls](https://www.deseret.com/utah/2021/2/22/22295155/poll-utahns-want-lawmakers-to-spend-extra-cash-money-education-income-tax-cut-2021-legislature) done in recent years by the same organizations as well as by [Envision Utah](https://www.deseret.com/utah/2020/10/17/21518160/utah-education-priority-2020-presidential-race-survey-envision) and the [Utah Foundation](https://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/utah-priority-no-2-state-taxes-and-spending/).

Here is the list of urgent unmet needs that Utah has not been able to address due to the state’s chronic revenue shortages, adding up to a total of $5.2 billion:

| **Budget Area** | **Amount** | **Details** | **Contacts** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| K-12: Reduce class sizes from 29 to 15 | $1.1 billion ($612m K-6 only) | Reduce class sizes/improve student/teacher ratio below the current Utah average of 29 (vs national average of 24) to optimum class size of 15. (Source: UEA) | Utah Education Association Director of Policy and Research Jay Blain [Jay.Blain@myuea.org](mailto:Jay.Blain@myuea.org) |
| K-12: Paraeducators | $312 million | Expand paraeducators to all Utah elementary classrooms. (Source: UEA) |
| K-12: Increase school counselors | $130 million | Increase school counselors per student to the national standard optimum of 1:250. Utah’s current ratio is 1:648, compared to the national average of 1:455.   (Source: UEA) |
| K-12: school psychologists, social workers and special ed teachers | $285 million | Increase student access to school psychologists, social workers and special ed teachers.  (Source: UEA)  Current and optimal ratios are:  School psychologists: Now 1:1950/Optimal 1:500  Social workers: Now 1:3000/Optimal 1:250  Special ed teachers: Now 1:35/Optimal 1:25 |
| K-12 Education: reduce teacher attrition and shortages | $500-600 million | Envision Utah [estimates](https://envisionutah.org/solving-the-teacher-shortage-when-the-world-is-on-fire) that we need to invest an additional $500-600 million each year just to reduce teacher turnover, where we rank among the worst in the nation. Our leaders’ unwillingness to solve our education underinvestment problem is why the majority-minority gaps in Utah’s high school graduation rates are worse than nationally and our younger generation of adults (age 25-34) have fallen behind their counterparts nationally for educational attainment at the college level (BA/BS+). |  |
| K-12 School Nurses | $84.4 million | The Utah Dept of Health annual report “Nursing Services in Utah Public Schools 2020-21” found that it would cost $84.4m to hire an additional 844 nurses so as to have one nurse in every public school building. There are currently only 224 nurse FTEs in Utah’s public schools, a ratio of 1 nurse for every 2,617 students. One nurse in every building would improve that ratio to 1:623, which would still be worse than the national average.  Sources: [www.utahschoolnurses.org/](https://www.utahschoolnurses.org/), [www.nasn.org](https://www.nasn.org), [www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2021/10/01/diane-nicoll-utah-schools/](https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2021/10/01/diane-nicoll-utah-schools/) | Dr. Jennifer Brinton, MD, President, American Academy of Pediatrics – Utah [jgbrinton@gmail.com](mailto:jgbrinton@gmail.com) and Dr. William Cosgrove, Past-President - [wecosgrove@yahoo.com](mailto:wecosgrove@yahoo.com) |
| K-12  Homeless Students | $105.8 million | HUD vouchers do not cover students and their families who are homeless under McKinney Vento Dept. of Education definition. For the 2019-2020 school year, Utah had a little over 13,500 K-12 homeless students. Some of them are duplicates as students move from one district to another. Also the same household has multiple children.  If we assume we have:   * 9,000 households with homeless students * fair market rent at $1,400 * families paying $420 for their rent (30% AMI) * voucher will pay $980 monthly * total annual allocation is $105,840,000   Source: Utah Housing Coalition | Utah Housing Coalition Advocacy & Outreach Coordinator Francisca Blanc – [FBlanc@UtahHousing.org](mailto:FBlanc@UtahHousing.org) |
| Full Day Kindergarten | $52.5 million | Voices for Utah Children [estimates](https://www.utahchildren.org/newsroom/speaking-of-kids-blog/item/1104-investinutahkids-an-agenda-for-utah-s-new-governor-and-legislature) that it will cost $52.5 million to make full-day Kindergarten available to all Utah families who would choose to opt in to it. | Voices for Utah Children Sr. Policy Analyst Anna Thomas [Anna@UtahChildren.org](mailto:Anna@UtahChildren.org) + Pastor Brigette Weier, Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church [pastor@oslcslc.org](mailto:pastor@oslcslc.org) |
| Pre-K and Child Care | $1 billion | Well over $1 billion is one [estimate](https://www.utahchildren.org/newsroom/speaking-of-kids-blog/item/1116-the-high-price-of-lower-taxes#/Utah) for a much needed comprehensive system of early childhood care and education (pre-k) in Utah. |
| Afterschool Programs | $3.6 million | Utah’s 303 afterschool programs serve 43,000 kids but still leave 99,000 unsupervised every day after school. During this past year’s 21st Century Community Learning Center grant competition in Utah, $1,062,816 was available and there was $4.6 million in requests, indicating a $3.6 million funding gap. (Source: Utah Afterschool Network) | Utah Afterschool Network Director Ben Trentelman – [BenT@UtahAfterschool.org](mailto:BenT@UtahAfterschool.org) |
| Health Insurance: Children | $5 million | It would cost Utah about $5 million to pay for [SB158](https://le.utah.gov/~2021/bills/static/SB0158.html) to remove barriers to health insurance coverage so that all Utah kids can access health insurance, including 12-month continuous eligibility. Utah currently ranks last in the nation for covering the one-in-six Utah kids who are Latinx and in the bottom 5 states for all children. Source: Voices for Utah Children | Voices for Utah Children Deputy Director Jessie Mandle [Jessie@UtahChildren.org](mailto:Jessie@UtahChildren.org) |
| Health Insurance:  New parents | $5 million | Extending Post-Partum Medicaid Coverage for new parents up to one year (now just 60 days) Source: Voices for Utah Children |
| Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Treatment | Uncertain | Utah ranks last in the nation for mental health treatment access, according to a [2019 report](https://gardner.utah.edu/close-to-one-in-five-utah-adults-experience-poor-mental-health-according-to-new-report/) from the Gardner Policy Institute.  A [2020 report](https://olag.utah.gov/olag-doc/2020-08_RPT.pdf) from the Legislative Auditor General found that Utah’s Justice Reinvestment Initiative had failed to achieve its goal to reduce recidivism -- and actually saw recidivism rise -- in part because “both the availability and the quality of the drug addiction and mental health treatment are still inadequate.” (pg 51)  Stakeholders identify the highest priority items as: housing and workforce capacity.  There is a need to expand student enrollment slots in universities for MSWs (Masters in Social Work), MFTs (Marriage & Family Therapists) and MHCs (Mental Health Counselors), and to provide scholarships at these institutions to attract students. |  |
| Disability Services | $30 million | The DSPD disability services [waiting list has doubled](https://dspd.utah.gov/reports/) in the last decade from 1,953 people with disabilities in 2010 to 3,911 in 2020.  The FY20 $1 million one-time appropriation made it possible to provide services to 143 people from the waiting list, implying that it could cost $30 million to eliminate the waiting list entirely. | Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities – Jan Ferre [janisferre@gmail.com](mailto:janisferre@gmail.com) |
| Rural Utah Economic Development | Uncertain | Rural Utahns should not feel that they need to abandon their home communities and add to the growth pressures along the Wasatch Front in order to provide for their families. Rural economic development would benefit all Utahns and reduce disparities between the Wasatch Front and other areas of the state. | Community Action Partnership of Utah - Stefanie Jones and Clint Cottam – [Clint@CAPUtah.org](mailto:Clint@CAPUtah.org) |
| Transportation Access | $300 million | Increase access to employment and educational opportunities for more people, especially lower-income communities. Provide additional transit connections, including extended evening and weekend service. Establish more ‘active transportation‘ (bike and pedestrian) connections to increase equity of access.  Source: Wasatch Front Regional Council |  |
| Left Behind Workers and Families | $154 million | Last year’s report “[Left Out](https://www.utahchildren.org/newsroom/speaking-of-kids-blog/item/1095-left-out-adding-up-the-cost-of-excluding-undocumented-utahns-from-state-and-federal-covid-19-relief): Adding Up the Cost of Excluding  Undocumented Utahns from State and Federal COVID-19 Relief” showed how undocumented Utahns and their families (comprising 39,000 households with over 100,000 individuals) work hard and pay taxes but were excluded from $154 million of federal COVID and unemployment relief. | Comunidades Unidas – Brianna Puga – [Brianna@CUUtah.org](mailto:Brianna@CUUtah.org) |
| Sexual and Domestic Violence | $85 million | Our economy incurs steep economic costs as a result of sexual and domestic violence. [The Center for Disease Control estimates](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html) that over a lifetime the costs for a female survivor are $103,762 and for a male survivor $23,414. These include medical costs, loss of employment or interruption of paid work, criminal justice system costs, among others.  The Utah Domestic Violence Coalition [2017 Needs Assessment](https://www.udvc.org/resources/policy-reports/reports.html) identified insufficient funding for shelters, affordable housing, child care, legal representation, and mental health and substance abuse treatment services as major obstacles to protecting women from domestic violence.  In the 2021 Utah Legislative Session, fourteen private non-profit domestic violence service providers submitted an [appropriations request](https://cobi.utah.gov/2021/1208/issues/17435) of $3.4 million in ongoing state funds. However, only $1.7 million was funded through federal TANF funds. No ongoing state funds were approved. Unfortunately, only two domestic violence service providers were able to accept and utilize the TANF funds. The remaining twelve domestic violence service providers were unable to accept those funds because TANF eligibility requirements conflict with Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) confidentiality provisions.  The actual cost to meet the needs of Utahns experiencing sexual and domestic violence is much higher than is reflected in the 2021 appropriations request and has been estimated to total $85 million. (Source: Utah Domestic Violence Coalition, Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Restoring Ancestral Winds) | Gabriella Archuleta, Director of Public Policy, YWCA Utah [garchuleta@ywcautah.org](mailto:garchuleta@ywcautah.org)  and  Yolanda Francisco-Nez, Executive Director of Restoring Ancestral Winds [yolanda@restoringawcoalition.org](mailto:yolanda@restoringawcoalition.org) |
| Housing | $415 million | Funding to build affordable housing state-wide for people earning less than 50% AMI. In Salt Lake County alone, the current need is $1 billion.  Affordable housing units fall 41,266 units short of meeting the need for the 64,797 households earning less than $24,600. Among extremely low-income renter households, 71% pay more than 50% of their income for housing, which is considered a severe housing burden.  *For more information on the current and ongoing needs visit* [*https://endutahhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HousingNow-Deck-12.pdf*](https://endutahhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HousingNow-Deck-12.pdf) | Utah Housing Coalition |
| Homeless Services | $55 million | Case manager positions have been underfunded for the past several years and most do not make a living wage. The homeless resource centers in Salt Lake County also maintain a perpetual gap in state funding of at least $3 million per year. In 2019, homeless service providers across the state sought $41 million in funding for ongoing programs, including case management.  At that time, the state provided $12 million. The following year, the state provided $9 million.  Covering even the basic needs of providers would be a huge step forward in our efforts to reduce homelessness across the state. | Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake - Jean Hill - [jean.hill@dioslc.org](mailto:jean.hill@dioslc.org) |
| Housing for Seniors | $30 million/  year for 10 years | If we don’t fund preservation of affordable housing for seniors we will lose valuable units. A very general estimate would be $50,000 per unit for perhaps 5,000 units.  This equates to $250 million in rehab costs.  What is more realistic is subsidizing 5,000 at say $500 per month or $30 million per year which would allow these projects to Borrow the money for rehab. Over 10 years the total is $300 million but the state would pay this over 10 years. The $250 million up front to rehab the units would likely keep them going for 10 years, then more rehab would be required. <https://www.utahhousing.org/preserving-senior-affordable-housing-report.html>  <https://nyuds.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=b8318f874017488ea9bdd51a296e59ef> for senior housing report | Utah Housing Coalition Director Tara Rollins [trollins@utahhousing.org](mailto:trollins@utahhousing.org) |
| Air Quality | $100 million | In 2018 [Gov. Gary Herbert proposed $100 million](https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2018/12/27/gov-herbert-wants-take/) for clean air initiatives but the Legislature did not fully fund this goal.  The Wasatch Front [ranks](https://www.stateoftheair.org/city-rankings/most-polluted-cities.html) as the 11th worst air quality in the nation for ozone and 7th worst for short-term particle pollution.  Investments should align with the principles in Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute [Road Map](https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/TheUtahRoadmap-Feb2020.pdf?x71849), and have fallen short in previous years. |  |
| Air Quality in Schools | $35 million | Funding for [air purifiers in every classroom](https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2021/08/17/john-macfarlane-utah/) in Utah, which would reduce the risks both from COVID and from Utah’s air pollution and could be expected to result in [improved school performance](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/10/28/the-importance-of-clean-air-in-classrooms-during-the-pandemic-and-beyond/), even more than standard interventions such as reducing class size by 30%, or “high dose” tutoring. (Source: Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment) | UPHE Director Jonny Vasic - [jvasicuphe@gmail.com](mailto:jvasicuphe@gmail.com) |
| Air Quality: Promote Transit | $60 million | Funding for UTA to eliminate fares entirely on all UTA conveyances as has been done already in dozens of cities to varying degrees, including in the SLC Free Fare Zone. (Source: Steve Erickson fiscal estimate, <https://freepublictransport.info/city/> ) | Steve Erickson - [erickson.steve1@comcast.net](mailto:erickson.steve1@comcast.net) |
| Hunger | Uncertain | It is clear that the state needs to do more in providing funding and other resources to help support local community food pantries. Earlier this year, Utahns Against Hunger conducted a community food pantry survey and found that in 2020, a quarter of pantry respondents had a funding gap, with 15% of respondents having a gap of $10,000 or more. | Utahns Against Hunger – Gina Cornia – [Cornia@uah.org](mailto:Cornia@uah.org) and Alex Cragun [Cragun@uah.org](mailto:Cragun@uah.org) |
| Utah EITC | $100 million | Utah should become the 31st state to offer a 20% state match to this highly popular federal tax break. This refundable tax cut targeted to low- and moderate-income working families has been proven to reduce poverty by drawing lower-skilled persons into the workforce, moving them toward independence and self-sufficiency. Most of this tax cut goes to the lowest income fifth of Utahns, those earning under $28,000, and the rest goes to the second fifth of the income scale, those earning under $50,000. | Voices for Utah Children – Matthew Weinstein – [Matthew@UtahChildren.org](mailto:Matthew@UtahChildren.org) |
| Eliminate the sales tax on unprepared food | $130 million | The food tax is the most regressive tax. One-third of it is paid by the lowest-income half of Utah households, who earn less than a sixth of all Utah income. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, low-income families pay 36% of their income on food while higher-income families spend only 8%. This is why 37 states do not charge any sales tax on food. | Rev Libby Hunter, Cathedral Church of St. Mark, speaking on behalf of the Coalition of Religious Communities (Bill Tibbitts – [bill@crossroadsurbancenter.org](mailto:bill@crossroadsurbancenter.org)) |
| About those water project boondoggles… |  | Federal rules permit the use of ARPA funds for water infrastructure projects, but Utah would save billions of dollars and millions of gallons by investing in conservation first to reduce usage in one of the most water-wasteful states in the nation. Those ARPA dollars would be better used addressing the urgent unmet human needs of our fellow Utahns. | Utah Rivers Council – Zach Frankel – [Zach@UtahRivers.org](mailto:Zach@UtahRivers.org) and Lindsey Hutchison [lindsey@utahrivers.org](mailto:lindsey@utahrivers.org) |
| Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion |  | Our public fiscal policies – how we generate and expend public investment dollars – have a direct impact on whether we are widening or narrowing the gaps between different groups in Utah. The new Utah Compact on Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion must be more than just words on a page.  <https://slchamber.com/public-policy/utah-compact/> | Angel Castillo, Ogden NAACP [angel4ogden@gmail.com](mailto:angel4ogden@gmail.com) |
| **TOTAL** | **$5.177 billion – more than double the amount of “surplus” revenue that the Legislature expects to have** | | |

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Live recording of press conference: <https://fb.watch/99bpgYEAqp/>

Graphical user interface, application

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