

Invest in Utah's Future, Not Tax Cuts

Published: Monday, 08 November 2021 12:09

Written by: Matthew Weinstein



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](#)" and should cut the state

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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](#) and the [Utah Foundation](#), 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](#) 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](#) done in recent years by the same organizations as well as by [Envision Utah](#) and the [Utah Foundation](#).

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:

| <u>Budget Area</u> | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Details</u> | <u>Contacts</u> |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--|
| 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 | Utah Education Association Director of Policy and Research Jay Blain Jay.Blain@myuea.org |

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|---|---------------|--|
| K-12: Paraeducators | \$312 million | class size of 15. (Source: UEA) 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 |

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| | | |
|---|-------------------|--|
| | | 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 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 | |

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The Utah Department 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.

Dr. Jennifer Brinton, MD, President, American Academy of Pediatrics – Utah jgbrinton@gmail.com and Dr. William Cosgrove, Past-President - wecosgrove@yahoo.com

Sources:
www.utahschoolnurses.org/,
www.nasn.org,
www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2021/10/01/diane-nicoll-utah-schools/

\$105.8 million

K-12:

HUD vouchers do Utah Housing

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Homeless Students

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

Coalition Advocacy & Outreach
Coordinator
Francisca Blanc –
FBlanc@UtahHousing.org

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allocation is \$
105,840,000

Full Day
Kindergarten

\$52.5 million

Source: Utah

Housing Coalition

Voices for Utah

Children [estimates](#)

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.

Well over \$1 billion is one [estimate](#) for a

much needed comprehensive system of early childhood care and education (pre-k) in Utah.

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

Voices for Utah

Children Sr. Policy Analyst Anna

Thomas

Anna@UtahChildren.org and Pastor

Brigette Weier, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

Well over \$1 billion is one [estimate](#) for a

pastor@oslcslc.org

Pre-K and Child
Care

\$1 billion

Afterschool
Programs

\$3.6 million

Utah's 303

afterschool programs

serve 43,000 kids

but still leave 99,000

unsupervised every

day after

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Learning Center

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Utah Afterschool

Network Director

Ben Trentelman –

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ool.org

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| Health Insurance: \$5 million Children | | million funding gap. (Source: Utah Afterschool Network) It would cost Utah about \$5 million to pay for SB158 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 |
| Health Insurance: | \$5 million | Extending Post- Partum Medicaid Coverage for new parents up to one year (now just 60 days) Source: Voices for Utah Children | |
| New parents | | | |
| Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Treatment | Uncertain | Utah ranks last in the nation for mental health treatment access, according to | |

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a [2019 report](#) from the Gardner Policy Institute.

A [2020 report](#) 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." (page 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

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| | | Health Counselors), and to provide scholarships at these institutions to attract students. | |
| Disability Services | \$30 million | | Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities – Jan Ferre janisferre@gmail.co m |
| | | The DSPD disability services waiting list has doubled 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. | |
| | 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 | Community Action Partnership of Utah - Stefanie Jones and Clint Cottam – Clint@CAPUtah.org |
| Rural Utah Economic Development | | | |

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Transportation Access \$300 million

development would benefit all Utahns and reduce disparities between the Wasatch Front and other areas of the state.

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: Adding Up the Cost](#)

Comunidades Unidas – Brianna Puga – Brianna@CUUtah.org

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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.

Sexual and Domestic Violence \$85 million

Our economy incurs steep economic costs as a result of sexual and domestic violence. garchuleta@ywcautah.org Gabriella Archuleta, Director of Public Policy, YWCA Utah
[The Center for Disease Control estimates](https://www.cdc.gov/diseasecontrol/estimates) that over a and 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 Yolanda Francisco-Nez, Executive Director of Restoring Ancestral Winds yolanda@restoringawc.org [wcoalition.org](https://www.restoringawc.org)

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system costs, among others.

The Utah Domestic Violence Coalition [2017 Needs Assessment](#) 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](#) 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

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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)

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| Housing | \$415 million | <p>Funding to build affordable housing state-wide for people earning less than 50% AML. 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.</p> <p>For more information on the current and ongoing needs visit https://endutahhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HousingNow-Deck-12.pdf</p> | <p>Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake - Jean Hill - jean.hill@dioslc.org</p> |
| Homeless Services | \$55 million | <p>Case manager positions have been underfunded for the past several years and most do not make a living wage.</p> | |

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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.

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

Utah Housing
Coalition Director
Tara Rollins
trollins@utahhousing.org

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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

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| Air Quality | \$100 million | <p>In 2018 Gov. Gary Herbert proposed \$100 million for clean air initiatives but the Legislature did not fully fund this goal.</p> <p>The Wasatch Front ranks as the 11th worst air quality in the nation for ozone and 7th worst for short-term particle pollution.</p> <p>Investments should align with the principles in Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute Road Map, and have fallen short in previous years.</p> |
| Air Quality in Schools | \$35 million | <p>Funding for air purifiers in every classroom 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, even more than standard interventions such as reducing class size</p> <p>UPHE Director Jonny Vasic - jvasicuphe@gmail.com</p> |

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| | | by 30%, or “high dose” tutoring. (Source: Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment) | |
| 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 |
| 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 | Utahns Against Hunger – Gina Cornia – Gina@uah.org and Alex Cragun Cragun@uah.org |

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| Utah EITC | \$100 million | having a gap of \$10,000 or more. 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 |
| 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 | Rev Libby Hunter, Cathedral Church of St. Mark, speaking on behalf of the Coalition of Religious Communities (Bill Tibbitts – |

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households, who bill@crossroadsurbancenter.org)
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.

About those water
project
boondoggles...

Federal rules permit Utah Rivers Council
the use of ARPA – Zach Frankel –
funds for water Zach@UtahRivers.org
infrastructure g and Lindsey
projects, but Utah Hutchison
would save billions lindsey@utahrivers.org
of dollars and rg
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.

Racial Equity,

Angel Castillo,

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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.

Ogden NAACP
angel4ogden@gmail.com

<https://slchamber.com/public-policy/utah-compact/>

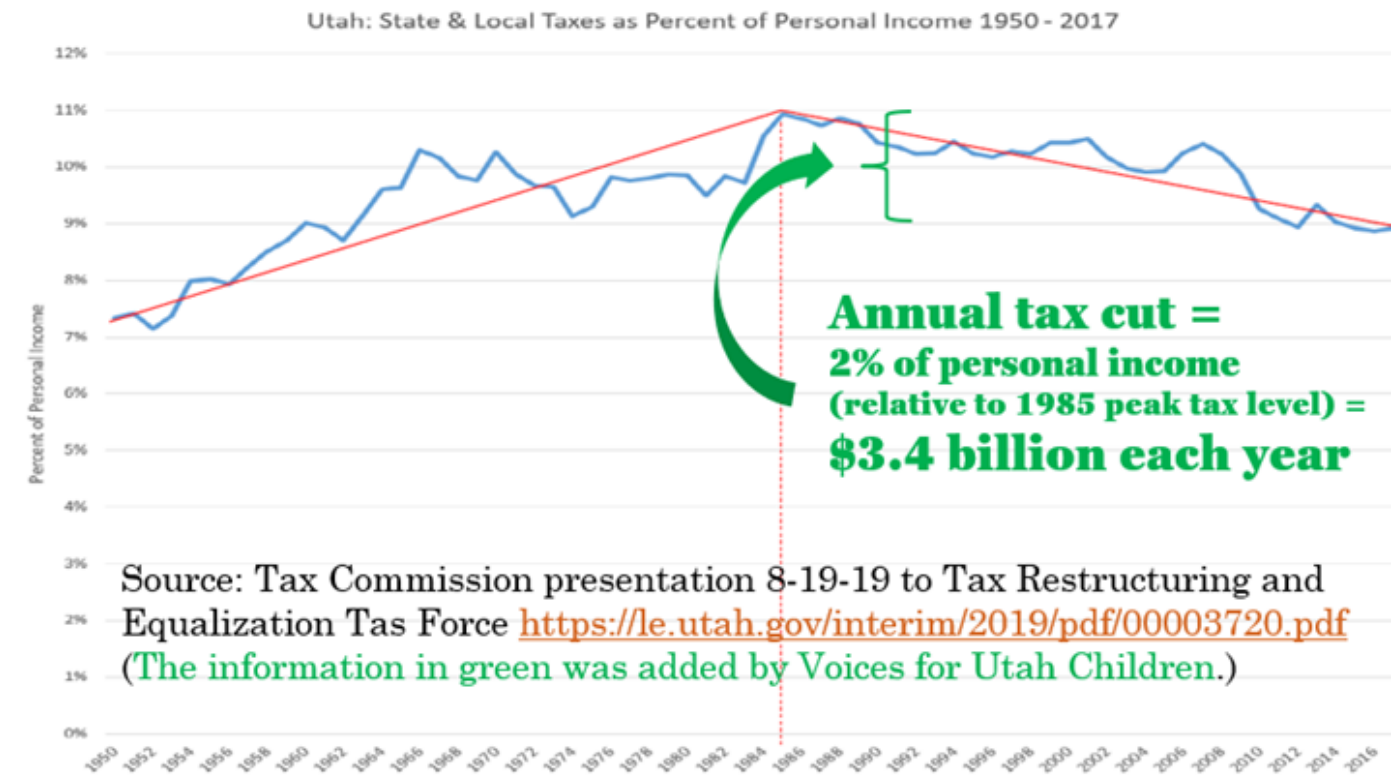
TOTAL **\$5.177 billion – more than double the amount of “surplus” revenue that the Legislature expects to have**

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Overall Utah Tax Burden



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How much have we cut Utah taxes?

Since 1985, we've passed tax breaks that now add up to **\$3.4 billion each year** – a 17% cut to Utah's revenues, leaving us with \$17 billion instead of >\$20 billion in FY22.



Live recording of the Invest in Utah's Future press conference
11/8/21: <https://fb.watch/99bpgYEAqp/>

Printable version of this document is [here](#).

Media coverage is posted at [KSL](#) and [Deseret News](#) and [Fox-13](#).

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ONE PAGERS ABOUT THE VARIOUS UNMET NEEDS:

- K-12 education: [UEA data infographic](#) and [UEA 2022 budget priorities](#)
- K-12 [school nurses info](#) from American Academy of Pediatrics - Utah Chapter
- [Rural Utah economic development](#) from CAP-Utah and [additional information](#) from Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity
- [Disability services information](#) from annual report of the Utah Division for Services to People with Disabilities
- Air quality: [Classroom air purifiers](#) from Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment
- Air quality and low-income transportation access: [Free Fare UTA one-pager](#) from Crossroads Urban Center
- Sexual and domestic violence [one-pager](#) from YWCA-Utah
- Sales tax on food [op-ed](#) from Deseret News
- [Income tax rate cut vs Utah EITC](#) one-page summary