ECONOMIC SECURITY

StateWide believes that economic security should be defined as having the income, resources and services and supports necessary to meet all basic needs, including housing, health care, transportation, food, miscellaneous essentials, and, when necessary, long term care.

- StateWide recommends that the state government use 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) as a closer approximation of economic security rather than 100% of FPL, to shape planning efforts as well as eligibility for service delivery. In so doing, the State will be able to direct services to those with the greatest economic and social need, including older adults with low-incomes, by focusing on those with incomes that fall short of economic security.

- StateWide will fight cuts to food programs, heating assistance and other important human service programs that provide assistance so that seniors and their families can live with dignity in the community. StateWide supports continuation of funding for the Weatherization Referral and Assistance Program (WRAP) for older New Yorkers to provide coordination of energy efficiency services for older persons.

- StateWide supports legislation to empower local assessors to extend the deadline for basic and enhanced School Tax Relief Program (STAR) applications until January 10 of the following year.

- Statewide supports the Age friendly banking initiative which will address the banking needs of seniors ranging from physical amenities in bank locations to bank product and services designed to better serve senior, disabled citizens and low income populations.

- StateWide will work to strengthen action against employers to prevent wage theft.

- StateWide supports paid Family and Medical Leave.
- StateWide urges the state to regulate the communications industry to achieve universal, affordable, high quality and technologically advanced service.

- StateWide urges an increase in the minimum wage, and to ensure a livable wage, future increases should be indexed to the rate of inflation.

**Financial Justice**
- Statewide supports efforts to end predatory lending.
- StateWide supports efforts to prevent property foreclosures.
- StateWide opposes efforts to alter the ban on usurious small-dollar loans.

**Housing**
- StateWide supports the expansion of affordable housing for the elderly throughout the state, including the establishment of a partnership authority to finance or collaborate in the financing of projects.
- StateWide encourages the expansion of senior citizen rent exemption and tax abatement programs and other adjustments to eligibility criteria for the exemptions that allows for non-reimbursed medical and prescription drug costs.
- StateWide opposes the use of “poor doors” that have been built in residential settings which permits landlords to designate separate entrances for low income residents.
- StateWide urges investment in supportive housing models that include inclusive design for those who may have physical impairments and often offer a variety of services including activities, transportation, an on-site service coordinator, amenities, meals, and support for residents’ health-related services.

**Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**
*StateWide supports making a permanent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in the state share of SSI in order to decrease the rate of poverty among our state’s poorest elderly, blind and disabled residents.*
- StateWide urges New York State (NYS) to pass through the annual Federal COLA without cutting NYS benefit.
• StateWide seeks renewed funding for community-based SSI specialist training, education, outreach, and enrollment assistance.

• Statewide advocates increasing the NYS supplement now by 20%.

HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The escalation of health care costs and failure of existing legislation to achieve universal coverage require continued emphasis on this vital issue. StateWide supports Universal Health Insurance, as the most effective vehicle for achieving universal coverage and cost control.

- StateWide will take the lead to advocate universal health care for all and will urge the passage of the “New York Health” legislation.

- StateWide will monitor the implementation of the Affordable Care Act to ensure that it is fair and realistic for senior citizens and their families.

- StateWide will fight state cuts in Medicaid that reduce coverage, due process rights on appeals of denials and grievances, access and quality of care not only for seniors, but the vulnerable disabled, and low-income children and families. We support the policy agenda of Medicaid Matters New York.

- StateWide opposes efforts to change state laws that prevent spousal impoverishment.

- StateWide opposes medical malpractice reform efforts that place a cap on an injured patient’s right to be awarded economic compensation for medical errors.

- StateWide calls for legislation to increase the Medicaid income eligibility level to 133% of the FPL for the aged.

- Given the increasing number of older New Yorkers, StateWide supports legislation to require training in geriatric medicine, pain management and palliative care for physicians and physician assistants to improve treatment for the specific needs of older adults.

- Statewide will oppose government efforts to raise needed capital for hospitals by allowing for conversion from non-profit status to publicly traded corporation status.

- StateWide supports mandating minimum staffing levels in hospital and long term care settings to ensure the safety and care of residents.

- StateWide supports efforts to stop the practice of sending nursing home residents out of state due to lack of capacity in a region by supporting training to
ensure that local providers can meet care needs, especially for those with dementia and other special care needs.

- StateWide supports the development of a public health system that is better prepared to deal with the effects of natural or manmade disasters, including a registry of seniors and persons with disabilities who may need assistance in an emergency; an improved infrastructure that supports provision of electricity, food, heat, water, and communications; and sufficient numbers of rescue and health personnel.

- StateWide supports inclusion of data on providers that have been denied Medicare provider status in the NYS physician profiling report law that requires disclosure of education and any findings of malpractice and/or misconduct.

- StateWide supports greater transparency in healthcare and opposes repeal of the Public Health Law’s requirement for the Department of Health (DOH) to maintain a Physician Profile.

- StateWide supports including pharmacies in the law that requires medical facilities to provide medical records to patients at minimal cost.

- StateWide supports including electronic cigarettes in the provisions of the Clean Indoor Air Act.

- StateWide advocates that insurers be required to offer coverage of out of network providers.

- StateWide supports reducing premiums for an enrollee who participates in a qualified wellness program.

- StateWide supports coverage for individualized customized complex rehabilitation technology.

- StateWide supports efforts to recruit and retain physicians in underserved and rural communities that face shortages of qualified medical personnel.

- StateWide supports enhanced funding for Vital Access Providers to prevent closure or reduction in needed hospital services.

- StateWide encourages the NYS Department of Health to collect patient data on disability status, primary language, housing status, sexual orientation and gender identity to support research needed to prevent health care disparities in service delivery.
- StateWide advocates for policies that will prevent hospitals from limiting patient visiting hours.

- StateWide supports regulation requiring that any Medicaid disenrollment notice include a referral to NY Connects so that those needing long term care services can get information and assistance.

- StateWide supports legislation requiring discharge planners to provide information to voluntary caregivers.

- StateWide supports the implementation of standards of training for personal care attendants and update home health aide training requirements.

- StateWide urges policies to support the production of marijuana needed to ensure its availability for medicinal purposes under the 2014 state law known as the Compassionate Care Act.

- StateWide supports incentives to recruit and retain home care workers.

**Prescription Drugs**

- StateWide urges the inclusion of persons with disabilities younger than age 65 under Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) and the continued funding of the EPIC program to ensure affordability of prescriptions.

- StateWide works to promote and protect New York consumer access to sources of safe, affordable prescription drugs. We support efforts to allow safe prescription drug importation to provide legal access to safe and affordable drugs from abroad.

- StateWide advocates swift implementation of the NYS bulk purchasing law, intended to lower the cost of prescription drugs for all.

- StateWide supports legislation to allow the importation of drugs from Canada.

- StateWide encourages the strengthening of oversight of drug companies’ marketing and advertising expenditures. We support regulation and accountability of Pharmaceutical Benefits Managers in New York and urge monitoring of abuses, such as not passing on savings to clients, hiding rebates, and steering market share to certain high cost drugs for particular drug manufacturers.

- StateWide supports the disclosure of gifts to prescribers from pharmaceutical industry representatives.
• StateWide supports effort to synchronize multiple prescriptions and standardize dispensing fees.

• StateWide urges the end of fail first accident/or health insurance policies that require a patient to exhaust the least expensive drug options before insurers will cover more expensive treatment options.

• StateWide supports giving patients the ability to pick up multiple medications at their pharmacy on the same day each month.

◦ Long Term Care

• StateWide supports strengthening compliance with the Olmstead Supreme Court decision to provide care in the least restrictive settings.

• StateWide supports mandating minimum staffing levels in nursing homes to ensure the safety and care of residents. We support strengthening training programs and requirements for long term care providers, including training for nurse aides, and requiring nursing homes to maintain staffing levels with trained Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), instead of the more poorly trained and poorly supervised feeding assistants. Further, we urge the state to allow for diversion of people in need of long-term care from facilities that have insufficient staffing.

• StateWide supports a careful review by the Department of Health of the qualifications and competency of adult home and assisted living facilities which seek further certification to care for vulnerable persons to make sure that those with poor records regarding patient care are excluded.

• StateWide urges an investment in home and community based services that prevent premature admission to long term care institutions and provide a safe alternative to institutionalized care.

• StateWide urges the adoption of policies that promote consumer-directed services.

• StateWide will monitor the implementation of Medicaid Managed Long Term Care and will advocate appropriate community based services to ensure access to and choice of culturally competent providers to meet patients needs. We will urge the inclusion of socially-oriented aging services providers in managed care networks.

• StateWide supports funding for an external consumer ombuds program for Medicaid beneficiaries enrolled in managed long term care programs.
• StateWide supports establishment of a state registry connecting consumers and providers of in-home services to expand care choices.

• StateWide supports authority for advanced home health aides to provide assistance with health related tasks that would comply with the full implementation of the Community First Choice Option.

AGING SERVICES

▪ StateWide supports maintaining the NYSOFA as an independent agency which advocates within state government for older New Yorkers. We will review recommendations related to a proposed Office for Community Living, but oppose the merger of aging and disability services through a restructured state agency and will work to ensure that there is a free standing, independent, well funded, well staffed and strong agency devoted to aging issues as its single focus.

▪ StateWide supports a strong and independent Long Term Care Ombudsman Program that stresses the rights of residents to receive quality care as well as to support those that wish to return to their community homes.

▪ StateWide supports restoration of funding to our Patients Rights Helpline/ Care Advocacy Project to $150,000 in order to establish a patient advocate program across the state.

▪ StateWide urges continuation of the line item funding for StateWide’s role in the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program.

▪ StateWide urges the permanent restoration of the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2011-12 fifty percent funding reductions to aging services programs funded by the NYSOFA, to ensure the stabilization of important community based human services non profit sector providers, with future funding growth to prevent fiscal fragility.

▪ StateWide supports funding to allow Medicare and Medicaid enrollees, and caregivers to receive unbiased information and counseling that is culturally and linguistically appropriate to ensure informed decision making when choosing health insurance and prescription coverage plans, and recommends increased funding for community-based outreach efforts to reach enrollees each year.

▪ StateWide supports expanded funding for services that are non-Medicaid funded but are relied upon by long term care clients under the Balancing Incentives Program, including NYConnects, EISEP, Wellness in Nutrition, Transportation, and Community Services for the Elderly.
StateWide supports increased funding for additional Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities and other aging in place/community projects. StateWide supports an overhaul to the NORC/NORC programs to address changing demographics and service needs.

StateWide urges the restoration of funding in the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) for kinship caregiver programs.

StateWide urges funding to educate seniors and constituents on the existence and type of elder abuse so that more people can become aware of this issue and report instances to the authorities.

StateWide proposes that elder abuse cases be reported to the police and prosecuted as a crime, and that banking institutions allow clients to opt for a report of suspected financial abuse be made to adult protective services and law enforcement.

StateWide supports requiring a biennial report on the incidence of elder abuse in New York State.

StateWide supports limitations on conservators’ and guardians’ overbroad authority over conservatees’ and wards’ lives. We urge prohibition of petitioning of the courts by long term care facilities for appointment of a guardian to ensure they are paid.

StateWide urges guardians to respect the right of adult children to visit an ailing or incapacitated parent who is either under power of attorney or under guardianship.

StateWide supports the expansion of outreach efforts to underserved populations and those with special needs including racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, rural seniors and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community which has an increasing number of older adults.

StateWide urges legislation that would give incentives for more professionals to work in the geriatric, mental health, and geriatric social work fields (Ex. partial loan forgiveness).

StateWide supports ensuring an ongoing COLA tied to inflation for nonprofit human services agencies to support the recruitment and retention of personnel in certain aging services, including EISEP and CSE.
- StateWide supports legislation to require source of designation of expertise, title or certification in senior issues be disclosed to clients as a means of preventing elder abuse.

- StateWide urges the development of a population based formula for multi-year funding of services delivered by local offices for the aging to address the growth in the aging demographic.

- StateWide opposes the requirement that local governments contribute a percentage match for new state funds for aging services, with maintenance of effort reflecting 2013 local share commitment.

- StateWide urges education of aging services providers and increased awareness to support inclusion of issues related to older persons who identify as LGBT

NOTE: Up to now we have reported on state legislation concerned with senior issues. But there are broader issues relating to the needs of all ages in our population which we are also vitally concerned about and require action on our part:

REVENUE

*StateWide promotes tax fairness.*

- StateWide urges the Legislature to adopt higher tax rates for higher earning households with annual incomes above $250,000.

- StateWide supports enactment of a property tax “circuit breaker” to reduce taxes on persons with lower incomes.

- StateWide opposes additional tax breaks for banking institutions.

- StateWide urges the closure of corporate tax loopholes.

- StateWide supports lowering utility taxes on low income residential consumers.

GUN CONTROL

- StateWide supports a more rigorous enforcement of background checks of people seeking to purchase guns according to federal law including closing background check loopholes for Internet and gun show sales, expanding the background check database and cracking down on the illegal gun market
ELECTIONS

Statewide will advocate for ballot accessibility so that voters are not disenfranchised, including:

- Urging appropriate font size.
- Opposing onerous voter identification laws.
- StateWide supports public campaign financing which is modeled on the system used in New York City to provide matching funds for donations raised.
- StateWide supports legislation allowing early voting 20 days before an election and automatically enroll citizens on their 18th birthday unless they choose to opt out of the system.
- StateWide opposes efforts to disenfranchise older voters by extensive questioning regarding their use of an absentee ballot. We urge the development of an absentee voting system that would allow voters to mail in ballots without declaring a reason why they are voting absentee and allow them to join a permanent absentee list.

NOTE: We also recognize that our planet is facing its most serious threat in terms of the effect of climate change. Although there is no specific legislation regarding this problem, StateWide promotes the spreading of information about this crisis, and encourages positive action.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

StateWide supports the efforts of New Yorkers Against Fracking and urges legislators to prevent any further action by the oil and gas industry to track for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale which resides under large parts of New York State.

- StateWide will oppose hydraulic fracturing (fracking)
- StateWide supports efforts to require NYS Department of Health to provide protection from exposure to radon in natural gas through continuous monitoring.
- StateWide supports mandatory labeling of genetically engineered foods and other consumable products.

HUMAN RIGHTS

- StateWide supports geriatric parole for certain non-violent prisoners.
Finally, StateWide recognizes the need for a solid educational program which is vital if our democratic system is to survive. We need a well educated population, therefore we support budgets for local school systems and programs which would improve this system.