

# JOURNAL OF AFFAIRS

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# FALL 2023 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

## **Grace Chen '25, Co-President**

Grace is a junior, majoring in Policy Analysis and Management in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined CPG in Fall 2021 as an analyst for the Economic Center and has previously served as the Economic Center Director. Grace's policy interests include the economic analysis of social welfare programs, policing and racial discrimination, and education. Outside of CPG, Grace is in Social Business Consulting, Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law Fraternity, Asian American InterVarsity, and is a research assistant for Professor Cunningham in the Brooks School. She also loves to dance, bake, and make Spotify mood playlists.

## **Benjamin Terhaar '25, Co-President**

Benjamin, a junior at the Brooks School of Public Policy, majors in Healthcare Policy and minors in Business. He joined Cornell Policy Group in 2021, focusing on public health and data-driven policy. At Harvard Medical School & The Vivli Center, Benjamin leads clinical research and integrates AI in medicine, while also contributing at Buffalo Medical Group and Ithaca Free Clinic. As President of Cornell Policy Group and New York State Vice President for Phi Beta Lambda, he demonstrates notable leadership. Published in The Roosevelt Review, Benjamin writes on healthcare policy. He's active in campus life as a Student Body Representative, Community Service Chair for Pi Kappa Alpha, and a Research Assistant. His hobbies include YouTube, running, reading, meditation, public speaking, and basketball. Benjamin is a rising star in healthcare policy and advocacy.

## **Franklin Zheng '25, Editor-in-Chief**

Franklin is a junior, majoring in Information Science and minoring in International Relations and German Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences. He joined CPG in the fall of 2021 as an analyst for the Center for Environmental and Technology Policy and is now serving as Editor-in-Chief. Outside of CPG, Franklin worked as an archival specialist at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research and has internship experience in the fields of technology policy and intelligence analysis. He is interested in privacy and data policy, security studies, and OSINT.

## **Joan Joseph '25, Director of Internal Affairs**

Joan is a junior, majoring in Healthcare Policy in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined CPG in the Spring of 2023 as an analyst for the Healthcare Center and currently serves as the Director of Internal Affairs. On campus, she is a member of Alpha Iota Gamma Pre-Health Fraternity, Cornell Healthcare Review, a social sorority, and TAs a class. She also loves to bake, binge shows, and take spin classes in her free time.

## **Reagan Allvin '26, Director of External Affairs**

Reagan is a sophomore majoring in Human Development in the College of Human Ecology and minoring in Policy Analysis and Management. She joined the Cornell Policy Group in her freshman fall as an education policy analyst. Reagan's policy interests involve state and federal level solutions to the widening academic opportunity gap. Outside of CPG, Reagan is a Marketing and Communications co-lead for the Cornell University Sustainable Design project team, the Promotional Chair for the Cornell University Program Board, and the secretary of the Big Red Bears. She is also involved in the Psi Chi Honor Society, Historical European Martial Arts club, E.Motion dance team, and the sport Taekwondo team.

## **Camille Brady '25, Advocacy Director**

Camille is a junior, majoring in Policy Analysis & Management in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined the CPG in the spring of her sophomore year as an analyst for the Center for Environmental & Technology Policy and now serves as Advocacy Director. Beyond CPG, Camille is an associate of Cornell's Impact Investing Club, volunteers for Cornell Cooperative Extension, and conducts research within the Brooks School. She also enjoys reading, photography, and upcycling.

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Riya is a senior, studying Policy Analysis and Management with a minor in Business and Health Equity. She joined CPG her freshman spring as a writer in the healthcare center. The following year, she served as Director of Internal Affairs. Last year, she served as Co-President and now serves as the Strategic Advisor for the club. With her passion in healthcare, she plans to pursue a career in healthcare consulting.

## FALL 2023 CENTER DIRECTORS

**Jessica Chen '24, *Center Director for Domestic Policy***

Jessica is a senior, majoring in Economics and minoring in Mathematics; Law & Society; and Crime, Justice Education, and Justice. She joined the Cornell Policy Group in her sophomore fall and now serves as Center Director for Domestic Policy. Jessica is interested in applied microeconomics and particularly city-level interventions in criminal legal systems, which can improve health, education, and employment outcomes. Outside of CPG, she has been researching policy interventions as research assistant for the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Professor Maria Fitzpatrick, and Professor Doug McKee. She currently serves as Vice President and Education Director for the Cornell Raptor Program, where she works daily to train birds of prey and coordinate outreach programs with local schools and the broader community. She intends to pursue a PhD in Economics with a focus in local policy.

**Elizabeth Fine '26, *Assistant Center Director for Domestic Policy***

Elizabeth is a sophomore Policy Analysis and Management major in the Brooks School of Public Policy with intended minors in Business and Demography. She joined the Cornell Policy Group in the fall of 2022 as an analyst in the Center for Domestic Policy. Elizabeth now serves as Assistant Domestic Center Director and is specifically interested in election and criminal justice policies.

**Gary Wu '26, *Center Director for Economic Policy***

Gary is a sophomore, majoring in Policy Analysis & Management in the Brooks School of Public Policy with plans on obtaining a minor in Business and Law & Society. He joined the CPG in the spring of his freshman year as an analyst for Economic Policy and now serves as its Center Director. Gary's policy interests include the economic impact of fiscal and monetary policy, the digital economy, and data privacy. Outside of CPG, Gary is a research assistant at the Labor Dynamics Institute, Brooks Ambassador, and Project Manager for Vision Brand Consulting. He also enjoys trying new foods, running, and drawing.

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Sahithi is a junior, majoring in Policy Analysis and Management in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined CPG in Spring of 2022 and has been an analyst and now assistant center director for the Economic Center. Her interests include higher education and internet policy. Outside of CPG, Sahithi is a part of International Business Consulting, a PUBPOL 2300 TA, a Logistics Coordinator for Cornell Undergraduate Economic Review, a research assistant in the Brooks school, and a member of Assorted Aces. In her free time, she loves to read and run.

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Sahil is a junior, majoring in Government and minoring in History as well as Law and Society in the College of Arts and Sciences. He joined CPG in Fall 2021 as an analyst for the Economic Center and is now serving as the Education Center Director. Outside of CPG, Sahil is a member of the Cornell Undergraduate Mock Trial Organization and researches democracy and voting rights.

**Isabel Lee '26, Center Director for Environmental & Technology Policy**

Isabel is a sophomore, majoring in Health Care Policy in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined CPG in the spring of her freshman year as an Environmental and Technology Policy Analyst and currently takes the role of the Environmental and Technology Center Director. Outside of CPG, Isabel is a Co-Facilitator of the Queer Pre-Health Association, a Cornell Healthcare Review writer, and a Crossword Editor for the Daily Sun. Her favorite artist is Tame Impala and is always open to music recommendations.

**Javier Vega '24, Center Director for Foreign Policy**

Javi is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences studying information science and government. He joined CPG the fall semester of his freshman year. Javi is interested in foreign policy, especially in how nation's environmental and energy policies interact, coalesce, compete, and influence decision making. Outside of CPG, he is the president of Cornell Venture Capital and has been interning at Google for two summers. In the future, he hopes to help curb climate change through private sector change.

**Bingsong Li '26, Assistant Center Director for Foreign Policy**

Bingsong is a Sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences majoring in Government, China-Asia-Pacific Studies, and Information Science. Being born in Singapore but having lived in America and China, he is interested in studying the Asia-Pacific the intersection between technology and foreign policy. Outside of CPG, Bing is involved in POLIS Government Pre-Professional society, the Translator-Interpreter Program, and is a writing tutor.

**Kaitlyn Z Varriale '26, Center Director for Healthcare Policy**

Kaitlyn, majoring in Health Care Policy and minoring in Health Equity, joined CPG as a freshman before becoming the Healthcare Center Director. Kaitlyn's policy interests center around pioneering and managing a more equitable, efficient, & high-quality healthcare system, strategically pairing health justice and optimal operations through an administrator's lens. Outside of CPG, Kaitlyn is the Founder and President of The Diabetes Link Chapter and the Vice-President of Undergraduate Affairs for Sloan's Women+ in Healthcare Leadership and leads in many other organizations both on and off campus. She aspires to receive an M.H.A. and become a health system administrator.

**Rachel Kim '24, Assistant Center Director for Healthcare Policy**

Rachel is a senior majoring in Healthcare Policy in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined CPG in the fall of 2022 as an analyst in the Center for Healthcare Policy. Her healthcare interests lie in public health, data analytics, and health equity.

**Shruti Nagpal '25, Assistant Center Director for Healthcare Policy**

Shruti is a junior majoring in Global and Public Health Sciences and minoring in Business. She is interested in policy surrounding reproductive health care, nutrition, and biomedical device regulation. Shruti aspires to attend medical school and specialize in obstetrics and gynecology.

*Journal compiled by Franklin Zheng*

## Editor's Note:

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the Cornell Policy Group, I am excited to publish the twentieth edition of the Journal of Affairs, the successor of the former Roosevelt Review.

Within our journal, you will discover a diverse array of research endeavors, each dedicated to the dissection of pivotal sociopolitical concerns. The depth of insight and innovative thinking within these pages underscore the policy creativity and prowess of our analysts. I am particularly excited to highlight our newest cohort of analysts. Their outstanding willingness to learn and improve in both writing and research, coupled with a demonstrated initiative for leadership, has been truly commendable. Their contributions have enriched the fabric of our organization and promise a future of sustained excellence.

During this past semester, the Cornell Policy Group underwent significant change. Following our recent transition, we have emerged as an independent student organization within Cornell University, embracing newfound flexibility and dynamism. This evolution allows us to chart our course with agility and respond adeptly to the ever-changing landscape of societal challenges. Looking ahead, we are exploring exciting partnerships, including potential formal collaborations with other institutions within Cornell. This venture promises enhanced opportunities for intellectual exchange and collective growth.

The Cornell Policy Group is on the cusp of a transformative chapter. Guided by our newly elected leadership, we anticipate dynamic collaborations, an enriched guest speaker series, renewed advocacy efforts, and a continued focus on professional development.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all those who have steadfastly supported the Cornell Policy Group. The role of Editor-in-Chief has once more been both a privilege and an honor, and I am eager to present the fruits of our collective intellectual endeavors.

In your perusal of these pages, I trust you will find both intellectual stimulation and a deepened understanding of the diverse policy areas covered herein.

Sincerely,

Franklin Zheng  
Editor-in-Chief

# DOMESTIC POLICY

Director: Jessica Chen

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# Conflict Diamonds and Complicity: Using a Diamond Tariff to Defund Human Rights Violations

By Rachel Baron, [rlb399@cornell.edu](mailto:rlb399@cornell.edu)

*Diamond mining notoriously funds violations of international human rights law. The United States should enact a tariff on all diamond imports to more effectively limit conflict diamond proliferation within the domestic market and limit funding of such abuses.*

## Background

Current regulatory attempts to separate the diamond industry from its tethers to human rights abuses are inadequate.<sup>1</sup> Conflict diamonds are defined by the United Nations as rough diamonds sold by rebel groups to fund action against a legitimate government.<sup>2</sup> Also known as blood diamonds, these gems have been fundamental in funding civil wars in many diamond-rich countries, notably Angola, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> In response to these wars, a coalition of 85 countries created the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) in 2003 to attempt to block conflict diamonds from entering international trade.<sup>3</sup> However, because the KPCS does not account for the negative impacts of diamond mining leveled against non-governmental bodies, the organization continues to certify diamonds that are used to fund human rights abuses perpetrated under the supervision of a legitimate government as being “conflict-free.”<sup>1</sup> The KPCS also does not apply to cut or polished diamonds, and the organization has historically been hesitant to impose sanctions on countries in violation of their standards.<sup>4</sup>

The use of diamonds to exacerbate human rights violations is particularly relevant in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The United States, the world’s largest consumer of diamonds at 55% of the 2022 global diamond jewelry demand, has banned the import of rough Russian diamonds or those cut and polished within Russia.<sup>5</sup> However, these restrictions don’t adequately curb Russian diamond income because approximately 90% of diamonds are cut and polished in India, regardless of their national origin.<sup>6</sup> Because Russian diamonds make up approximately 33% of the global market, this means that at minimum, 23% of the diamonds processed in India are sourced from Russia.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, because diamonds change hands 20-30 times between the mine and their final sale, conflict diamonds from any country can be easily smuggled into the process.<sup>6</sup>

## Policy Idea

The United States Congress should levy a tariff on all imported natural diamonds at an average rate of 2%. This tariff should be implemented until the substantial human rights crises associated with diamond mining have been resolved. To determine this

measure, the United States should issue a report on the state of international diamond mining and human rights every five years, which will evaluate the current conditions of diamond mines across the globe and where diamond profits are being directed. The money generated through this tariff should be divided between aid for countries and peoples heavily impacted by the human rights crises of diamond mining and subsidies for synthetic diamond production.

## Policy Analysis

This tariff would reduce the United States’ indirect funding of human rights violations by diamond-rich countries, namely Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The United States has committed \$43.9 billion dollars to Ukraine since February 2022.<sup>7</sup> Without a diamond tariff, the current failure of diamond restrictions would continue to indirectly fund Russia, which could lengthen the war and cost the United States more in aid.

The absence of a tariff continues to support violations of human rights in other countries, including the labor of an estimated one million children working in artisanal and small-scale mining, forced labor and human trafficking,

and targeted killing and sexual violence directed towards native communities.<sup>8</sup> A 2013 report on three mining communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo found a 93% rate of slavery, with 23% of those enslaved being children.<sup>9</sup> A diamond tariff would effectively curb American economic support for these international human rights violations.

The tariff would further benefit the United States by stimulating the domestic production of synthetic diamonds. In 2021, the global synthetic diamond market was valued at \$21.4 billion dollars, a figure that is expected to increase to \$43.7 billion dollars by the end of 2031.<sup>10</sup> However, the synthetic diamond market is overwhelmingly dominated by China, which occupied 56% of the 2019 global market compared to the United States' 13%.<sup>11</sup> A diamond tariff would create domestic jobs and claim a more competitive share in the global market.

### Highlights

- Current regulatory attempts to address the proliferation of diamonds that fund human rights abuses within the global market are ineffective. These regulations, domestic and international, fail to both uphold proper criteria for identifying violations of human rights as well as take effective action against them.
- A diamond tariff would limit American funding for the international human rights violations associated with diamond mining. This defunding is critical to

current American international goals of limiting funding to Russia, which is the world's largest producer of raw diamonds.<sup>6</sup> Other countries implicated in violating human rights via diamond mining include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup>

- Increased domestic synthetic diamond production would create American jobs in a rapidly growing industry. The expanding job market would decrease unemployment, stimulate local economic growth, and promote a cheaper and environmentally friendly option to importing natural diamonds harvested through unfair or illegal labor conditions.<sup>12</sup>

### Implementation

There already exists a present American interest in limiting the proliferation of Russian diamonds within the global market. The bill should be introduced through the House Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee, which is responsible for tariffs.<sup>13</sup> The policy may be expected to enjoy bipartisan support due to its defunding of Russia, specifically its war with Ukraine, and support for domestic market and job growth. Possible conservative discontent with tariffs abridging the free market may be alleviated due to the emphasis placed on channeling money toward the United States over Russia. This free-market concern may also be irrelevant for the modern Republican Party given their widespread support for Trump-era

tariffs levied on Chinese products.<sup>14</sup>

House caucuses such as the Congressional Human Trafficking Caucus, the International Workers' Rights Caucus, and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission should all be petitioned for their support on such a bill. The Human Trafficking Caucus' bipartisanship may particularly inspire greater unity in favor of the bill. Trade Subcommittee member Earl Bleumenaour (D-OR) may be a key figure in promoting this bill through the House due to his affiliations with both the Human Trafficking Caucus and the Human Rights Commission.<sup>15</sup>

Given such a policy, extensive interest group action against the implementation of the bill is expected by diamond companies threatened by profit loss, especially Russian-owned diamond giant Alrosa. While Alrosa or other foreign diamond companies cannot directly interfere with the legislative process, ambassadors on behalf of American-based branches of companies associated with the companies, including Tiffany & Co., can.<sup>16</sup> In order to best counter potential corporate lobbying against the bill, human rights organizations that have worked extensively to research human rights abuses associated with diamond mining should be requested for their official endorsement and mobilization. Amnesty International USA, Human Rights Watch, and similar organizations carry with them extensive grassroots mobilization that is often leveraged into political power to influence legislative voting. The success of Amnesty's campaign to enact the U.S. Tribal Law and Order Act can once again be replicated for this bill.<sup>17</sup> Targeted



campaigning on behalf of these organizations can offer the necessary counterpressure from corporate lobbying and successfully pass the bill through Congress.

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# Improving the US Asylum System through a Fair, Efficient, and Holistic Approach

By Jonathan Lam, [jl4377@cornell.edu](mailto:jl4377@cornell.edu)

*The United States should apply a complementary protection standard within the country's asylum system to ensure that all asylum seekers receive safe protective residency.*

## Background

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996, a major immigration reform law, established an “expedited removal” process with the hopes of clearing cases from immigration court dockets with new screening procedures.<sup>1</sup> However, the Act resulted in increased inefficiency and unfairness within the US asylum system due to a lack of consideration for factors regarding immigrants’ circumstances such as humanitarian crisis.

US policymakers had spent two decades trying to construct workable asylum procedures. Despite their efforts, an immigration court backlog of 186,000 cases at the beginning of President Obama’s term in 2009 increased to 540,000 cases in 2017 during the beginning of the Trump administration.<sup>2</sup> President Biden came into office with a backlog of over 1.29 million cases, which demonstrates the failing asylum-seeking process.<sup>3</sup>

Under the Trump administration, the implementation of Title 42 blocked access to the asylum legal process at the country’s borders, created regulatory strangleholds on asylum procedures, and eliminated well-established grounds for providing protection, particularly for migrants fleeing certain countries due to gang

violence, domestic abuse, and other extreme circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Although the US has temporary protected status (TPS) for asylum seekers to access some level of protection, TPS is still not completely accessible, inclusive, or protective. TPS is a program allowing certain asylum seekers whose home countries are considered unsafe to live and work in the US for a temporary period.<sup>5</sup> While TPS provides protection based on extraordinary situations such as violence, conflicts, or natural disasters that makes return unsafe, it is not applied during an individual’s status determination.<sup>6</sup> Rather, TPS eligibility is determined by asylum seekers who were already in the US, which completely excludes newly arriving asylum seekers in practice.

## Policy Idea

Most countries with individualized asylum systems – except the US – apply three protection standards for asylum seekers through either a single hearing or interview process to decide whether to grant asylum. The US ought to implement similar protection standards for asylum seekers through a complementary protection process.

The first step in the process should be to determine if the asylum seeker qualifies as a refugee under the “well-founded fear of

being persecuted” standard of the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>7</sup> If not, then the individual should be considered for human rights protections under other international conventions to minimize the risk of torture, degrading treatment, or other serious threats to life upon return. Finally, the actual entity that will be the decision maker should consider the need for “complementary protection” based on conditions of generalized violence or other extraordinary conditions that could bring a risk of serious harm to an individual if they were to return.

## Policy Analysis

A complementary protection standard would expand protections to asylum seekers who don’t qualify under the 1951 Refugee Convention definition or the Convention Against Torture standards. By applying these standards, US Citizenship and Immigration Services asylum officers would be able to grant asylum and conduct pre-screening interviews, thus keeping many easily granted cases out of overloaded immigration courts. In an interview or hearing, asylum officers or immigration judges would be able to determine if an applicant qualifies for asylum according to the overall circumstances the individual may endure.

Applying a complementary protection standard would enable adjudicators to grant asylum to people fleeing violence without requiring an exhaustive examination. It would go a long way both to reducing the immigration court backlog and keeping current with new applications, while also recognizing the protection needs of many.

The US can apply a similar model as other nations. In 2015, Germany had an influx of about 890,000 asylum seekers; however, after applying a complementary protection standard along with the refugee and human rights convention standards, the nation greatly decreased its backlog and was keeping up with new applications by 2017. Furthermore, Mexico has also applied a complementary protection standard after noticing a central issue surrounding corruption with police and immigration officers attempting to block asylum seekers from access to proper procedures. In 2019 after the implementation of a complementary protection system within Mexico's asylum law, the approval rates in 2019 stood at 86 percent for Salvadorans, 83 percent for Hondurans, and 62 percent for Guatemalans.

### Highlights

- American asylum and immigration court systems are facing backlogs and delays and there is bipartisan support to address this issue.<sup>8</sup> Making timely decisions will benefit the system by improving its integrity and safeguarding refugees and their families.
- A complementary protection standard would largely

benefit asylum seekers who don't qualify under the 1951 Refugee Convention definition, the Convention Against Torture standards or those who aren't considered under TPS.

- Other countries such as Germany and Mexico have seen successful results as a result of implementing a complementary protective system for asylum seekers.<sup>9,10</sup>

### Implementation

If the US were to implement the proposed policy, a person seeking protection would go through a single hearing or interview. Rather than building expensive barriers that complicate the asylum system and make it harder for refugees to navigate, the executive branch and Congress should prioritize investing in the staffing and resources required to ensure that the Asylum Division and immigration courts can make fair and prompt decisions. The one-year filing deadline bar has a counterproductive and detrimental impact on the US asylum system and therefore should be eliminated. Furthermore, an immigration judge or a USCIS officer should apply one of two standards in a sequential order. The first standard should be based on the fear of being persecuted, and the second standard should be based on the threat posed to the person's life or physical integrity from violence or exceptional situations.

To meet the obligations under the Convention against Torture, a US immigration judge is already required to consider whether it is more likely than not that the person would be tortured

before ordering them to be removed from the country.<sup>11</sup> However, this protection against torture does not give the person any immigration status or the right to adjust to a lawful status. The obligations under the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) also require US immigration judges not to return anyone to face a real risk of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, although these obligations have not yet been recognized in US courts.

As various grounds for exclusion such as the person's criminal history may apply in the asylum context, these grounds may also extend to the grant of complementary protection. The US should retain a separate post-removal order examination of claims under the Convention against Torture and the ICCPR for people who could be excluded from status on other grounds. Expedited removal should be eliminated, especially for families with children and in areas other than formal US ports of entry. The use of immigration detention should always be guided by measures that protect personal freedom and prevent arbitrary detention, as well as the overuse of detention. These measures should include impartial court review and, at a minimum, access to immigration court custody hearings, both initially and after six months of detention. Due to the proposed policy's broader grounds for protection and undifferentiated benefits for both asylees and beneficiaries of complementary protection, it is appropriate to consider a longer duration of temporary residency status to adjust to permanent residency.

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# Paying the Time and the Dime: Lowering Costs for New York State Prisoners through Phone and Commissary Funding Reform

By Elizabeth Fine, [egf25@cornell.edu](mailto:egf25@cornell.edu)

*The high financial costs incarcerated individuals in New York State face each day for phone time and commissary products are disproportional and unaffordable. The State should reallocate funds to cover portions of these costs and lower the prices paid by inmates.*

## Background

New York State imprisons more individuals than some countries yet struggles to ensure basic essentials to inmates.<sup>1</sup> When utilizing phone communication services with family and friends, prisoners often show decreased rates of re-offense, with those able to maintain strong connections to their families 25% more likely to end illegal activity after release.<sup>2</sup> As of late 2021, the average cost in New York for an in-state, 15-minute call from a local jail is \$2.60, compared to rates as low as \$1.05 in New Jersey, \$2.03 in California, and \$1.35 in Rhode Island.<sup>3</sup> At state-operated facilities, inmates are charged \$0.035 per minute of phone time.<sup>4</sup> While these rates may be affordable for the public, incarcerated individuals in New York State are paid an average rate of only 10 to 65 cents an hour as of April 2023.<sup>5</sup> Financial obligations such as child support and state property damages can further decrease inmates' wages by up to \$1 per week, a substantial amount considering 80% of inmates are already considered of low economic status.<sup>6,7</sup> While communication is a fundamental part of inmates' wellbeing and long-term, post-release success, phone rates are not the only unaffordable

aspects of prison life. Former New York State inmates reported a need for at least \$175 per month for basic needs, including food and clothes bought from prison commissaries— in-facility stores that, along with phone calls, intake \$2.9 billion nationwide.<sup>8,10</sup> Despite such high revenue, the costs of collecting the fees from phone calls and commissaries often substantially diminish their value, with some prisons ending up with only 6% of the actual fee charged to inmates.<sup>6</sup> Commissary prices are more sensitive to inflation, which presents difficulties to many citizens, let alone those working for significantly less than minimum wage.<sup>11</sup> The costs of prison life are unsustainable for many behind bars, and with such a large prison population, it is New York State's responsibility to ensure all of those in its custody have access to necessary resources.

## Policy Idea

New York State should follow in other states' leads and lower the personal financial costs burdening lowest-income prisoners by capping the prices of phone calls, medical supplies, supplemental food purchases, along with other needs within prison walls. By implementing a maximum

price for prison phone and commissary charges per month, there will be a disincentive to overcharge inmates, allowing for the incarcerated to bear less of the currently disproportionate economic burden.

## Policy Analysis

New York State can afford to cover at least a portion of these costs considering the prison population has decreased by 8% in only the last year as a result of decreased crime state-wide.<sup>14</sup> The costs that were previously allocated to supporting the larger prison population could be used to fund these new monthly budgets, which would be determined by the state on a facility basis. Based on this funding model and understanding that the average prisoner costs New York State an annual \$82,288 as of 2021, the State saves \$6,583.04 per prisoner with an 8% decrease in the prison population.<sup>15</sup> Since prisoners previously reported the need for \$175 per month, this difference in costs is more than enough to afford the \$2,100 prisoners report needing annually.<sup>8</sup> The prices set in place in each facility will be guided by their new savings and annual costs to provide services.

New York City has already experienced success in implementing phone rate regulation in the form of agency-sponsored calls in which a correctional agency is charged three cents per minute but is not expected to contribute past \$3 million in revenue to the calling companies per year.<sup>3</sup> Expanding this methodology to commissary profits would allow prisons to keep a flow of income while avoiding overburdening the prison population with unaffordable prices. In allocating a certain portion of costs to the correctional agency before charging prisoners, inmates may be able to better access phone calls and necessary resources, ultimately decreasing recidivism rates. This is an especially important favorable outcome of the policy considering that New York State has the highest rate of reincarceration for parole violations in the country.<sup>15</sup>

According to the most recent NYS DOCCS report in 2017, a steady total of 40% of released individuals have returned to prison since 1996.<sup>9</sup> Since New York City alone pays \$556,539 per year for each prisoner, decreasing the recidivism rate would ultimately save the criminal justice system money.<sup>12</sup> Effective change requires investment, and by investing in decreasing the financial burdens of inmates while incarcerated, the system can save money on future prisoners while easing the experiences of current inmates.

### Highlights

- When they utilize phone communication services with family and friends, prisoners often show decreased rates of re-offense, with those able to

maintain strong connections to their families 25% more likely to end illegal activity after release.<sup>2</sup>

- Incarcerated individuals in New York State are paid an average rate of only 10 to 65 cents an hour as of April 2023.<sup>5</sup>
- Former New York State inmates reported a need for at least \$175 per month for basic needs, including food and clothes bought from prison commissaries, in-facility stores that—along with phone calls—intake \$2.9 billion nationwide.<sup>8,10</sup>
- Considering that New York City alone pays \$556,539 per year for each prisoner, decreasing the recidivism rate would ultimately save the criminal justice system money.<sup>12</sup>

### Implementation

Within the New York State Legislature, committees and key legislators will play a vital role in reducing phone rates and commissary prices. The Chairman of the Committee on Correction in the New York State Assembly, Erik M. Dilan, and Chairwoman of the Crime Victims, Crime and Correction Committee in the State Senate, Julia Salazar, are the first two individuals who would help facilitate the successful passage of a state-level policy.<sup>16,17</sup> As the Committees hold meetings and hearings, specific testimonies from people familiar with the details of this issue would help emphasize the prevalence of the problem. Specifically, individuals involved in New York University’s Brennan Center for Criminal Justice would be able to convey their research on

the monetary needs reported by inmates that support the proposed policy. Former incarcerated would further support these findings, with many still paying criminal justice debts after their releases.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of the implementation timeline, there would be a delay until conversations with phone providers can occur as prisons transition from paying for the collection of the fees from inmates to paying higher portions of the cost of the goods and services provided. Considering there will be variation between facilities, an effective implementation strategy would include a deadline by which new prices should take effect. This deadline would likely be most successful around a year in advance, allowing for facilities to collect their savings as a result of funding a lower prison population.

While backlash from prisons, hesitant to change their systems, and politicians, concerned over the costs of the policy, would likely be encountered throughout the process, the design to shift funding to specifically avoid increasing the overall corrections budget through using existing savings may make the policy more favorable to its critics. As incarcerated individuals continue to struggle with day-to-day fees and New York State grapples with its large prison population and costs, working to divert phone and commissary funding so prisoners pay a lower share should be pursued as soon as possible.

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# Creating a Federal Grant Program to Help Influx of Displaced Venezuelan Migrants in Chicago

By Gabriella Sanchez, [gls247@cornell.edu](mailto:gls247@cornell.edu)

*President Biden must pass an executive order to provide shelter and food for Venezuelan migrants flocking to Chicago as well as address ongoing concerns from poverty-stricken Chicagoans competing with migrants for shelter.*

## Background

Chicago's "Welcoming City Ordinance" bars police from cooperating with federal agents and detaining anyone solely based on immigration status. As of 2018, more than 560 cities, states, and counties are considered sanctuaries, municipalities that limit or deny cooperation with the federal government in enforcing federal law; Chicago is one city.<sup>1</sup> Due to political persecution and economic turmoil in their home country, over 17,000 Venezuelans have migrated to Chicago in the past year. They have exhausted many of Chicago's resources and have been sleeping in police stations, tents, and airports.<sup>2</sup> Welfare programs for Venezuelan migrants should be prioritized by both federal and state governments, as they comprise the largest group coming through the southern border.

With resources starting to dwindle, Chicago Governor JB Pritzker has urged the federal government to step in and provide grants for housing and food.<sup>3</sup> In previous years, presidents used executive orders to address imminent issues while also furthering their political agendas. The Constitution gives Congress the power of the purse, but the president cannot spend money without congressional approval.

However, executive orders can bypass this process, enabling the president to disperse funds, particularly from contingency funds.<sup>4</sup> In the past, executive orders have been used during times of natural disasters, including Hurricane Katrina during Bush's administration.<sup>5</sup> Executive Order 13389 provided resources to rebuild the regions of the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. Former President Obama also issued an executive order during the Flint water crisis, ordering federal aid to supplement state and local responses to water contamination in Flint, Michigan.<sup>6</sup>

## Policy Idea

President Biden should issue an executive order to support Chicago in providing food, shelter, and other basic necessities to Venezuelan migrants. The executive order should mandate the Shelter and Services and Emergency Food Program to provide more assistance in facilitating housing and opening more food pantries in Chicago. Through this executive order, Chicago can help the growing homeless population in densely populated migrant communities.

## Policy Analysis

Biden's pro-immigration views have recently been tested by the influx of migrants through the southern border. In the past few months, President Biden has taken a harsher stance on immigration, deporting undocumented Venezuelan migrants and authorizing funding to finish building the wall along the southern border.<sup>7</sup> Although he maintained a pro-immigration stance for the majority of his administration, the president has faced opposition from both parties regarding Venezuelan immigration, with Republicans busing them to Democratic, sanctuary cities often with insufficient resources to support them.<sup>8</sup>

In his executive order, the president should provide funding to shelters and the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, as it is running low on shelter beds. Furthermore, President Biden should provide funding to food pantries, including Pilsen Food Pantry which offers food, clothing, and health screenings to those who cannot afford them in the greater Chicago region.

Chicago officials should hire social workers to inform migrant communities about such opportunities. Specifically, the Red



Cross, Centro Romero, and National Immigrant Justice Center volunteers and field staff should help migrant workers and inform them of available resources. In addition, the federal government should hire more legal aid service providers and pro-bono attorneys to assist migrants in obtaining work permits.

### Highlights

- Since it may take up to two months before migrants can work, officials must prioritize providing housing/basic necessities. To accommodate the thousands of migrants, a more streamlined emergency response approach is needed.
- In addition to the exorbitant number of migrants entering the country, there are over 68,000 Chicagoans experiencing homelessness.<sup>9</sup> As a result, native Chicagoans and Venezuelan migrants are competing for basic necessities.
- 180,000 undocumented immigrants currently live in Chicago but are excluded from obtaining work permits.<sup>10</sup> Starting early November, the Resurrection program in Chicago is assisting undocumented immigrants in obtaining work permits, providing some relief for migrants who tend to be underpaid and under-employed.

### Implementation

An executive order that establishes the necessary resources to address the migrant crisis in Chicago would be viable and

therefore should be implemented. Given the upcoming presidential election, President Biden's actions in Chicago have momentous implications on his approval rating and chances of re-election, as immigration is the third most important issue among US voters.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Biden must create an executive order with contingency funds to provide more resources to migrants during their work permit application processes as soon as possible.

Before the executive order, Biden must identify food pantries/homeless shelters to provide support for migrants and homeless Chicagoans. Namely, he could work with Pilsen Food Pantry, Dion's Chicago Dream, and Nourishing Hope to help reach more communities and aid them in their distribution of food, as food insecurity is continuing to rise among migrant and homeless populations.<sup>12</sup> Chicago officials should contact local lawyers to help migrants determine if they are eligible to apply for work permits. Ideally, this process should happen in the coming days, as obtaining work permits can take up to two months.

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# Expanding High-Speed Rail in the Northeast to Reduce US Carbon Emissions

By Elliott Serna, [es2242@cornell.edu](mailto:es2242@cornell.edu)

*To reduce the United States' net carbon output, Congress should fund a Department of Transportation interstate high-speed rail development program to expand long-haul passenger lines in the Northeast Corridor.*

## Background

Following China, the United States is the second largest producer of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, accounting for 13.6% of total global carbon dioxide output in 2022, with northeastern states contributing a large proportion of that footprint.<sup>1,2</sup> Given its immense share of global carbon output, the US has a key opportunity—and responsibility—to combat climate change by reducing domestic emissions, particularly in Northeastern states.

To reduce domestic emissions, however, it's important to identify the economic sectors that contribute most to national carbon output. According to the EPA's 2021 *Inventories of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks*, transportation produces the largest share of national carbon emissions, with 28% of total US greenhouse gas output deriving from the transportation sector, making it a strategic domain to focus carbon reduction efforts.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, cars contribute the highest proportion to transportation's emissions, accounting for 87% of the 4.95 trillion passenger miles traveled by Americans in 2020, 516 billion of which were traveled in the Northeastern States.<sup>4,5</sup>

Furthermore, given that American passenger cars emit roughly 4.6 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per car per year, implementing policies

to reduce American car usage in highly car-using regions first is an efficient, targeted way to reduce domestic carbon emissions.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, a more energy-efficient alternative to cars in America already exists in the form of passenger rail. Rail has better passenger-mile efficiency and a higher person-to-vehicle efficiency rate. In addition, rail is about 2.3 times more efficient than cars in energy-use per passenger-mile.<sup>7,8</sup> Expanding rail access could thus supplant car usage and reduce car-associated carbon emissions in the US. Focusing expansion efforts within the existing Northeast corridor first would make sizable progress in reducing net US carbon emissions and create a precedent for further rail expansion projects.

## Policy Idea

The United States Congress should fund a multifaceted DOT-administered interstate rail development program to:

I. Continue commissioning surveys of Amtrak and private railway coverage gaps in the Northeast Corridor (NEC);

II. Make sensible public-private partnerships with existing rail and transit agencies in the Northeast region with the broader goal

of developing an economically sustainable network of public, arterial HSR passenger lines and minor adjoining commuter lines replicable in other corridors; and

III. Issue locally informed directives on railway project implementation and administration across the Northeastern states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland.

This investment program should be funded by Congress, administered by the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in collaboration with relevant state and local authorities, and periodically audited to ensure the program is meeting performance goals set by the DOT.

## Policy Analysis

Dating as far back as 2009 with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRP) funding the FRA's High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program (HSIPR) and as recently as the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding the Corridor

Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID) and Interstate Rail Compacts Grant Program, there exists legislative precedent for the federal investment in HSR development.<sup>9,10</sup>

However, as is particularly the case with the 2009 HSIPR program, it is important to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of past federal rail development programs to design a revitalized investment program like the one proposed here.

In his study, “Assessing the Results of the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program,” Wendell Cox, a policy analyst with the Reason Foundation, identifies the most critical limitations associated with past federal HSR investment programs like HSIPR.<sup>11</sup> Cox argues that federal HSR programs are high-cost and low-benefit, citing expensive project forecasts like the FRA’s projected \$266-308 billion cost for a DC-Boston HSR line in the NEC and the Congressional Research Service’s findings that “most highway traffic is local and the diversion of intercity trips from highway to [HSR] will be small.”<sup>11</sup> It is for this very reason, however, that this proposal diversifies the FRA’s approach toward rail expansion. By investing in a few arterial HSR lines, costs—though not foregone—are minimized; and by promoting the development of adjoining higher speed passenger lines, more of the car-using population will be reached, thus broadening the scope of benefits of the program.

### Highlights

- Passenger rail has better passenger-mile efficiency, a higher person-to-vehicle efficiency rate, and higher

energy efficiency than a car. Supplanting car usage with rail would effectively reduce America’s carbon footprint.<sup>7,8</sup>

- Legislative precedent for federal investment in HSR development dates as far back as 2009 with Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and as recently as Biden’s 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Both bills created DOT grant programs for rail development.<sup>9,10</sup>
- Developing major arterial HSR lines in conjunction with adjoining higher speed passenger lines minimizes costs while broadening the program’s range and reach of benefits. Combining major HSR development with minor rail line improvements and expansions is more effective than an either-or solution that invests in one while foregoing the other.<sup>11</sup>
- Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg’s support of HSR, bipartisan openness to service improvement projects, and growing public support for HSR alludes to a policy window for action on HSR development.<sup>16,17,18</sup>

### Implementation

Given the political environment of Congress, who would need to pass a bill to authorize a long-term HSR development program, it is important to establish upfront how this proposal addresses the three chief concerns associated with HSR development:

- a. Federal-state-private sector partnerships in funding, administering, and sustaining a rail revitalization program;<sup>12</sup>
- b. Geographic, demographic, and economic constraints of rail development;<sup>12</sup> and
- c. Federal government jurisdiction to develop railways at state and regional levels.<sup>12</sup>

The proposed policy is designed to address these three challenges, incorporating a federal-local cooperation stipulation in project management, a private-public project financing element, and an evaluative DOT research component.

To the challenge of forging federal-state partnerships, the federal government must play a more active role in planning and coordinating rail projects to ensure program efficacy.<sup>13</sup> Since the Obama administration, rail development has lacked sustained federal support and funding, causing project delays and cost overruns.<sup>13</sup> This proposal would empower the federal government to move beyond short-term grant financing of state rail projects and toward broader co-financing and project planning (through the research component) alongside local and state agents.

The federal-state cooperative element also addresses the challenge of jurisdiction. By expanding the federal role in project planning, the federal government can coordinate with states to fairly secure rights-of-way for new developments.<sup>13</sup> This cooperative element addresses the concerns of Republican congresspeople and private property owners, two

influential opponents to American HSR. Addressing these two groups' concerns of federal projects invoking eminent domain to encroach on private land, the cooperative nature of the proposed partnership empowers states to ensure projects are sensitive to local needs and demands.<sup>14,15</sup>

The proposal reflects the recommendations of key HSR proponents like the Regional Planning Association, Amtrak, and Secretary Buttigieg to garner political support while addressing conservatives' property rights concerns to assuage opposition and appeal to moderate swing votes in Congress. Fortunately, hints of a policy window exist given Secretary Buttigieg's support of HSR, bipartisan openness to service improvement projects, and growing public support for HSR, meaning action on this proposal is timely.<sup>16,17,18</sup> However, this policy window may be temporarily closed as President Biden—and by extension, Secretary Buttigieg—is up for reelection in 2024. The looming election means political capital would have to be expended to move this proposal to the floor in the remainder of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress or paused until after the 2024 election, after which the political calculus would change if an opponent less privy to HSR unseats President Biden.

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# ECONOMIC POLICY

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# A Policy Analysis of Financial Incentives Related to the Implementation of Solar Farms in Abandoned Gravel Pits

By Carson Appel, [cla85@cornell.edu](mailto:cla85@cornell.edu)

*The United States government should implement tax incentives to cover both the property tax for the designated gravel pits and the construction of solar panel farms on the gravel pit site.*

## Background

A solar farm, based on the national average, costs anywhere between \$890,000 and \$1.01 million, equating to around 89 cents to a dollar per watt generated.<sup>1</sup> In comparison to residential solar panels, which cost around three dollars per watt generated, solar panel farms are a cost-effective way to integrate large-scale solar panels.<sup>1</sup> Alternatives to solar panels were researched to measure the importance of solar panels in comparison to other renewable energy production methods. Wind turbines, for example, need to be 60 to 120 meters tall.<sup>2</sup> A similar eco-friendly form of power, wind turbines have rotor diameters of 220 meters, a total height of around 248 meters. Because the depth of a commercial gravel pit can reach as deep as 40 meters, utilizing wind in such areas would increase the cost of implementing wind turbines in such a low area.<sup>2,3</sup> Dams, an additional eco-friendly alternative to solar panels, are built to provide energy to large surrounding areas. Because of this, a dam requires a running stream or river to hold water back. Although they can efficiently produce large amounts of energy, dams have a tremendous impact on the local stream wildlife.<sup>4</sup> When researching gravel

pits, it was found that in 2020 there were 1,423 operational gravel pits in the state of New York.<sup>5</sup> The gravel pits are an example of the possible infrastructure this policy would cover. After gravel pits have served their intended commercial purpose, they become a financial burden on businesses and investors. In Ithaca, New York, the land used for gravel pits on average costs \$10,250 per acre.<sup>6</sup> Annual taxes on these lands usually cost around \$250 per acre per year.<sup>6</sup> This estimate when applied to the national average gravel pit size of 10 acres, equates to a \$2,500 cost annually.

## Policy Idea

New York policymakers in conjunction with Ithaca elected officials should construct a tax incentive system or provide several subsidies to cover the building of solar panels in abandoned, retired gravel pits. The proposed plan should cover 20% of initial solar farm implementation costs, then offer 30% land-based tax incentives to cover property taxes for the first nine years of operation. By using these gravel pits to establish solar panel farms, investors can prolong their investment on the land and aid in the US government's national push

to become more reliant on renewable energy sources.

## Policy Analysis

Much of the cost of solar panels stems from installation; as solar panels generate more energy, they become more cost efficient.<sup>7</sup> It is estimated that in three to seven years solar power in certain developed countries such as France, will cost the same as other cheaper alternatives in the energy market.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, solar panel leasing by both businesses and individual customers allows owners to earn a healthy return on the extra power they send back into the communal electricity grid.<sup>7</sup> Typically, leasing solar panels will generate \$400-\$2000 per acre per year for investors. A privately/commercially owned solar farm typically will generate \$21,250 to \$42,500 per acre per year.<sup>8</sup> Based on these prices, a 10-acre solar panel farm can generate \$212,500 annually at the least and \$425,000 at the most.<sup>9</sup> Operating at minimum efficiency, it would only take around five years to cover the installation costs. The remaining 20 to 25 years are all profitable returns on investment.<sup>9</sup> Currently, most of the development into this field is on a trial basis. In Maine, Nautilus Solar turned a retired sand quarry into a community solar farm. In



implementing this solar farm, 20 to 25 full time jobs were opened and around 35% of the construction involved was covered by skilled local workers.<sup>10</sup> The newly renewable energy source provides clean energy to 66 commercial off-takers within the Central Maine Power territory and creates annually 10 million kWh.<sup>10</sup> A new gravel pit solar plan is a proposed 120-megawatt solar energy project in East Windsor, Connecticut.<sup>11</sup> The plan will create more affordable renewable energy for customers in Connecticut, it is estimated to provide 12,000 homes with clean power.<sup>11</sup> This plan significantly increases tax revenue for the town while minimizing sound or visual impacts of the solar farm.<sup>11</sup> Both of these cases are examples of how this form of solar panel installation is becoming more prevalent. When evaluating the effectiveness of this policy it is important to evaluate whether this form of installation is achievable and how this solution will be utilized.

Currently there are policies in place to establish tax incentives for implementing solar power, but they focus more on individual consumers' benefits. For instance, the NY-Sun tax rebate cuts down by around \$1,200, in partnership with a 30% federal tax credit and 25% state tax credit, this plan can cut down prices per unit of solar panels from \$19,800 to \$8,370.<sup>12</sup> This estimate could cut total average solar panel farm prices to around \$426,900.

### Highlights

- The purpose of this policy is to utilize abandoned gravel pits as solar panel farms.
- Tax incentives to cover the installation of solar panels

and the property tax of the gravel pit site would cover owners' costs.

- Installing panels in pits would answer political backlash around the “view obstruction” created by typical solar panel farms.
- This policy would increase US renewable energy infrastructure, while covering costs for gravel pit owners until the implemented panels would prove profitable.

### Implementation

NY-Sun tax incentives should be used to model the tax incentives to add an additional 25% property tax credit to cover property taxes for the first nine years of solar farm operations. The \$1,200 tax rebate should be added to solar farm implementation in gravel pits on a per panel basis. Because of federal goals to be solely powered by renewable energy by 2030, a timeline should be created to implement this policy in 2024 with a 7% tax incentive. Gradually the incentives should increase by 3% annually until the tax is capped at the intended 25% in the year 2030. The \$1,200 tax rebate should be adjusted annually to increase at the equivalent rate as property taxes. Support for this policy implementation should start on the local scale. Local governments that account for most of the abandoned gravel pit ownership require education to support this policy. By integrating public solar panel farms, the money generated by publicly owned farms could be used to offset town taxes or be put towards other local infrastructure developments. The support of both political parties would be needed to implement such

a policy. Advertising for this policy should be mainly targeted toward conservative members, as they are strong supporters for removing the solar panels as the panels restrict the view. Left-leaning democrats generally support the implementation of solar panel farms using federal, state, and local tax funding. Backlash could come at the slight increase in taxes due to the policy's provision of tax incentives. An educational campaign around the increase in tax incentives would need to cover how increasing tax incentives would increase public tax prices slightly. The campaign would need to prove to business owners this policy would decrease initial and operation costs. The taxes generated from participating business owners could decrease taxes to leave a net total tax decrease for public taxpayers. The highest decrease will be experienced after the nine-year tax credit utilization per solar farm.

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# Remove Parking Requirements to Accelerate Affordable Housing Construction

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*Affordable housing development is not keeping up with the homelessness crisis in America. The national removal of parking requirements would incentivize the construction of affordable housing for developers and reduce home prices for low-income families.*

## Background

After the Great Recession, construction rates of new homes dropped rapidly: there were fewer new homes built between 2008 and 2018 than in the previous four decades.<sup>1</sup> While the total number of new developments has been slowly increasing since, they have yet to reach pre-Great Recession levels.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the recession, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic gave way to a materials and labor shortage that exacerbated the housing shortage, made evident by the surge in home prices throughout 2021.<sup>1</sup> The Federal Reserve's increase of interest rates over the past two years has also worsened the crisis, as hopeful buyers' purchasing power has plummeted amid soaring housing prices.<sup>3</sup>

The impact of this shortage is felt most by low-income households. According to the Urban Institute, there are only 7 million affordable units for 11 million households with extremely low incomes. 3.3 million of the 7 million are occupied by households with higher incomes.<sup>4</sup> There is currently a shortage of 7.3 million affordable rental homes for renters with extremely low incomes in the US. This figure is up eight percent from 6.8 million in 2019.<sup>4</sup> The accelerated construction of affordable housing must occur to close this housing gap, but

significant obstacles complicate the process. Parking requirements in particular impede the construction of affordable housing, as they exert substantial costs on both developers and renters. Parking requirements refer to policies that mandate new developments to build a particular number of parking spaces. Building parking requires a greater amount of land, incurs hefty construction costs, reduces development density, and hikes environmental/aesthetic costs.<sup>5</sup> These additional costs may be acceptable to most middle- and upper-income households, but they impose disproportionate financial burdens on lower-income families.

## Policy Idea

Starting immediately, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) should impose a rule that effectively removes parking requirements for all developments that designate at least five percent of units as affordable housing for low-income individuals or 10 percent of units as being publicly financed. HUD should establish a regulatory department within the agency that enforces these proportion requirements, making sure developers don't cease parking construction without providing the mandated number of affordable units. The threshold for being considered "low-income" shall be

any household whose income is at or below 80% of the average median income in the household's municipality.

## Policy Analysis

Research supports that removing parking requirements incentivizes the construction of affordable housing for developers, making housing more plentiful and accessible to low-income individuals. A 2020 study in *Land Use Policy* found that the elimination of parking requirements in Seattle led to an associated savings of more than \$500 million in direct construction costs.<sup>6</sup> The study found that removing requirements leads to the reduced provision of parking, which in turn saves costs for developers and slashes housing prices for consumers.<sup>6</sup> According to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute, Hartford's abandonment of parking minimums has already sped up building rehabilitation projects.<sup>7</sup> A 1998 University of California study found that single-family housing without off-street parking sold for an average of \$46,391 less than housing with off-street parking, and so were affordable to 24% more area households.<sup>8</sup> The study also found that the number of households that could qualify for loans on condos without parking was 20 percent

greater than the number that could qualify for those with off-street parking.<sup>8</sup> A 2021 survey of 19 Denver properties surveyed that were built during the last six years found that of 883 parking spaces built, but only 461 were used, resulting in 422 unnecessary parking spaces with estimated production costs of \$22,000 per space or \$9.28 million dollars in total.<sup>5</sup> Another 40-unit supportive housing apartment building could have been built with the potential savings.<sup>5</sup>

### Highlights

- The Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with rising home prices and interest rates, have exacerbated the housing shortage in the United States, disproportionately impacting low-income households.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Unnecessary parking spaces can incur substantial costs. Building parking requires a greater proportion of land, incurs hefty construction costs, reduces development density, and hikes environmental/aesthetic costs.<sup>5</sup> Parking typically represents 10-20% of the cost of housing, which may be acceptable to most middle- and upper-income households, but imposes significant financial burdens for lower income families.<sup>5</sup>
- Parking requirements hinder the construction of affordable housing, adding substantial costs for developers and renters, effectively acting as a development tax, which prevents the construction of

lower-priced housing in high-land cost areas.<sup>5</sup>

Removing parking requirements in affordable housing construction can lead to reduced production costs, a plethora of additional affordable housing units, and increase the number of households that could qualify for loans on condos.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

### Implementation

The removal of parking requirements in public housing development should be done through HUD, specifically through a legislative rule. To do so, pressure must be put on HUD to take action on the issue. This policy has the potential to garner support from a wide range of individuals, as it carries incentives for both developers and low-income communities. Outreach will be the biggest obstacle in the way of the policy's success, as communication must take place with developers, state housing agencies, community boards, transportation advocacy organizations, environmental advocacy organizations, and advocates for affordable housing. This should be done as soon as possible. Mobilizing these various organizations and interest groups to put pressure on HUD will greatly contribute to the successful implementation of the policy. Potential expanders for the removal of parking requirements in public housing development include Strong Towns, the National Low Income Housing Association, and Transportation for America. Strong Towns is an American nonprofit organization dedicated to helping cities and towns in the United States achieve financial resiliency through civic engagement. This organization should be consulted on how to best conduct outreach at the grassroots

level regarding affordable housing. The National Low Income Housing Association is a non-profit dedicated to building affordable housing and could assist in garnering public support for the removal of parking requirements. Transportation for America is an American policy organization that supports progressive transportation and land use policy. It should be consulted on how to bolster public transportation systems as parking becomes less available.

Once the policy is implemented, advocacy work must be done to inform low-income individuals that new housing is being built. Building affordable housing is only efficient if there are tenants who are informed regarding the housing (particularly its affordability) and are willing to move in. This outreach can be done in several ways: HUD could send community liaisons to homeless shelters and food banks to speak about new housing construction, information sessions can be held in areas with high homeless populations, etc. Outreach to developers should also take place, as they must be informed of the new regulations in order to build accordingly. Representatives from local and state housing associations can meet with developers to discuss the most efficient and effective means of utilizing the new regulations.

Backlash may be encountered from communities in which driving is the primary mode of transport. Opponents of eliminating parking requirements argue that reducing off-street parking puts pressure on existing parking, worsening traffic congestion.<sup>9</sup> This congestion may create implementation problems in

suburban areas and rural areas, which do not have the same level of public transit infrastructure that large cities have.

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# Sustainable Financial Future for Students: Centralizing Financial Aid and Federal Benefits System

By Simone Chan, [sc3336@cornell.edu](mailto:sc3336@cornell.edu)

*To help provide financial assistance to higher education and reduce national student debt, the United States Federal Government should develop a new centralized financial aid and benefits system.*

## Background

Higher education financial aid was created with the implementation of the Higher Education Act of 1965, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as a part of the Great Society domestic agenda. The mission of the Act was to provide financial assistance to students in postsecondary and higher education and help make educational resources more accessible.

In recent years, the assistance provided by federal student aid has failed to keep the strength of support as it originally intended. College costs have risen at a rate that significantly exceeds the general inflation. The average tuition has increased by 747.8% since 1963 and has been continuously increasing by 12% on average from 2010 to 2022.<sup>1</sup> The annual Consumer Price Index has jumped from 218.1 in 2010 to 292.7 in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Correspondingly, student debt has more than doubled over the last two decades to compensate for the increasing tuition.<sup>3</sup> As of March 2023, 44 million US students owe more than \$1.6 trillion in federal student loans.<sup>3</sup> Though attending college and attaining a degree comes with multiple benefits, the income premium that generally comes with a higher education

background has declined over the last fifty years, causing doubts about attending college.<sup>4</sup> On average, a middle-class student owes about \$37,718 in federal loans.<sup>5</sup> The average repayment plan ranges from 10 to 30 years to repay those loans.<sup>6</sup> Compared to the average Bachelor's degree starting salary of \$58,862, the income premium of having attended college is statistically nonexistent and even hindering, as students may have taken on other debts to sustain basic needs while repaying their loans.<sup>7</sup>

Pell Grant was originally created to reduce college financial and attendance costs concerns. In 1972, the Pell Grant covered around 80% of public college tuition; today, it only covers about 30% of the cost.<sup>8</sup> The amendment of the financial aid system is urgently needed for the socio-economic benefit of both individual students and the nation's health.

## Policy Idea

The government should develop a new financial aid program to create a comprehensive and unified approach toward supporting students in higher education. Any outside scholarships, grants, and/or benefits a student receives should not decrease the government financial

aid amount. Mental illness should be considered to be on par with physical illness to ensure equity in all health challenges. The federal government should develop a single platform for the request of all loans, grants, and related scholarships. To protect college tuition against inflation in the US economy and to ensure the value of financial aid, the amount provided should be annually adjusted in accordance with inflation.

## Policy Analysis

Financial aid's inability to compensate for the rising cost raises concerns about the financial burden on students and its long-lasting consequences on the nation's economic stability. Combining governmental grants like the Federal Supplement Educational Opportunity Grant, scholarships from various federal agencies, and/or other benefits like SNAP on one platform will provide a more simplistic application process, which serves as an incentive for students to apply as they are filling out their financial aid applications. Having one uniform system for the application has been shown to have a positive correlation with the number of applicants, similar to colleges using Common App (a unified college application portal), which sees about a 10% increase on

average in total admission applications.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the University of California's (UC) Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan was able to waive the tuition of 52% of California undergraduate students by having one automated and accumulated financial aid system across nine campuses.<sup>10</sup> The plan combines all sources of scholarship and grants to cover tuition fees. The UCs are able to enroll and graduate more low-income students compared to any top research university in the country, with a high Pell enrollment of 40% and Pell graduation of 80%.<sup>10</sup> When more students apply for financial aid and governmental benefits, the cumulative student loan amount will decrease as students have more income to circulate back into the economy. A slight increase in consumption with changes in student loans was estimated within Q4 of the GDP report after implementation.<sup>11</sup>

### Highlights

- Financial aid grants like the Pell Grant used to cover 80% of college costs; now it only covers 30%.<sup>8</sup>
- There has been a growing disparity between tuition and financial aid since 1965, with tuition outpacing inflation by over 700%.<sup>1</sup>
- The amount of student debt has doubled in the last two decades, and millions of US students now aggregately owe trillions in federal student loans.<sup>3</sup>
- A single, simplified federal program for all student welfare and financial aid would reduce redundancy for students in multiple aid programs.

- Ensuring any outside scholarships, grants, and/or benefits a student receives do not decrease the government financial aid amount and that the financial aid amount is in line with inflation would prevent erosion in aid value and manage student debt.
- The policy aims to boost the economy by increasing education accessibility, expanding consumer spending, better employment opportunities, and reducing the long-term burden of student loan debts. More income will be reinvested back into the market and stimulate economic growth.

### Implementation

To mobilize support for the policy, the outreach should be targeted toward the major public educational institutions such as the UC system, California State University, and the State University of New York. Public institutions like these rely on government subsidies, and a high percentage of their students receive financial aid. For instance, approximately 71% of undergraduates in the UC system receive some form of financial aid.<sup>10</sup> Through close collaboration with these institutions, the goal is to gather data on the relevance of financial aid dependency on enrollment and graduation rates, along with student and alumni narratives, to form advocacy material for lobbying. This data collection process would likely take three to six months.

The evidence retrieved from higher education institutions should be presented to key financial aid

organizations like the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators and the National College Attainment Network that have successfully lobbied for simplification of the financial aid process with bipartisan support. With their support and network, the policy should be presented to relevant government entities, specifically the Department of Treasury and the Department of Education.

A similar precedent is seen with the FUTURE Act (which enables the IRS to share data with FSA to ease the financial aid process) and Social Security (all benefits in one application), both of which received bipartisan support. Both streamlined bureaucratic systems demonstrated success in leading to a more efficient government service. The proposed policy stands a good chance of receiving similar approval. However, there are concerns about possible tax increases from grant expansion that may cause the policy to experience pushback.

To address such concerns regarding tax increases, a proactive community outreach plan should also be enacted simultaneously. The plan will involve having higher education institutions and partnering organizations hold social media campaigns, public forums, and events that educate the long-term economic benefits of investing in financial aid, such as the expansion of the middle class and the positive feedback loop it creates for the economy. Individuals who support this policy should be encouraged to contact their local legislators and officials to stimulate more support for sponsorship. This advocacy process would take place until the policy is signed into action.





# Leveraging the Resources of Public and Private Sectors to Address Homelessness across the United States

By Alice Lee, [al2335@cornell.edu](mailto:al2335@cornell.edu)

*While the United States excels economically, it nevertheless struggles with a substantial homeless population. To address this, the US should foster public-private partnerships (PPPs) in social services, pairing private expertise with regulatory power and funding for efficient resource utilization and implementation.*

## Background

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) first Annual Homelessness Assessment Report found that nearly 600,000 Americans are unhoused on any night and about 30% of people without homes are experiencing chronic patterns of homelessness.<sup>1</sup> HUD's Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) of 2009 consolidates three homeless assistance programs administered by HUD into a single grant program and revises the Emergency Shelter Grants program to be named the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program.<sup>2</sup> The ESG program awarded \$290 million to 359 states and localities to address homelessness through social services, street outreaches, and transitional assistance, part of the annual formula grants provided by HUD.<sup>3</sup> While these funds are directed toward establishing housing, such large amounts can also be allocated to services that focus on root causes of homelessness. Assistance programs dedicated to solely building housing units, like "Housing First", have failed in the past, as "federal homelessness assistance spending increased 200% between 2009 and 2019," while the number of

"unsheltered individuals in the US increased by 20.5% in that same time period."<sup>4</sup> Other approaches, such as "mixed-income housing," depend on the idea that people with low incomes need to be immersed in "better neighborhoods."<sup>5</sup> However, relocation into any housing does not guarantee economic opportunity, and "mixed-income housing" only perpetuates housing discrimination.<sup>6</sup> While housing is a means and foundation for economic freedom, resource inequality should be prioritized. Homelessness disproportionately affects generationally low-income households, further delaying financial security. For long-term sustainability, merely providing permanent housing lacks the commitment necessary to address homelessness. A holistic framework involving services tending to common barriers to stability, access to employment, education, and healthcare can set individuals up for economic mobility.<sup>7</sup>

## Policy Idea

The US should implement public-private partnerships across the country to expand the extent of outreach in addressing homelessness, while mutually benefiting both sectors through a more sustainable approach. The US

should mandate local governments and nonprofits to collaborate with various private institutions, such as banks, land developers, and investors, to accumulate funding and power toward organizing supportive services. Public agencies should contribute access to community land, pool of volunteers, and regulatory oversight while private entities should incorporate their business models and improve their ESG reputations. The proposed policy will foster PPPs to maximize each state's pool of funding and encourage the implementation of widespread social services intended to address the root causes of homelessness.

## Policy Analysis

By mandating PPPs in all states, the US can reduce homelessness rates and stimulate economic mobility. In Los Angeles, the Home for Good Funders Collaborative is one such partnership, consisting of 25 private and public funders, including banks and health foundations putting in cross-sector efforts to end homelessness. The initiative housed over 32,000 homeless individuals and pooled in investments through Proposition HHH, bringing \$1.2 billion in resources to create 10,000 units of permanent housing.<sup>8</sup> While

this initiative simply built housing, it also demonstrated the extensive funding generated through PPPs; such funds can implement health clinics, job training, mental counseling, and addiction treatments. Additionally, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration branch of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) offers the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness program, funding services for homeless individuals with mental illnesses.<sup>9</sup> This formula grant is distributed annually to all 50 states, outreaching to over 100,000 individuals in 2021 and enrolling nearly 60,000 clients with the following: diagnostic treatments, rehabilitation, substance use treatment, referrals for primary healthcare, job training, and educational services.<sup>10</sup> Pairing such federal grants with nonprofits and private institutions highlights the potential to provide housing-assistance services beyond substance treatment. Homes for the Homeless in NYC provides services focused on education and employment, exemplified in their Allie’s Place Center for Culinary Education & Employment, preparing individuals for employment in food industries.<sup>11</sup> Pouring collaborative funding into such service-focused organizations rather than housing development programs tolerates more sustainable action.

### Highlights

- Implementing public-private partnerships across the country would expand the extent of outreach and resource pool to address homelessness.

- Simply building housing developments or units is not sufficient to address the systemic nature of homelessness. Such partnerships accumulate funds to be used toward programs and services meant to target root causes of homelessness, such as access to education and healthcare, substance abuse, unemployment, and mental health issues.
- The US federal government should utilize HUD’s Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) Program’s funding as initial endowment to establish social services. While public agencies can provide initial funding, property, and data, private institutions should contribute their business expertise, volunteers, and investments while uplifting their corporate social responsibility images.
- Public-private partnerships within local cities and states have been successful at mitigating homelessness in the past. Mandating these redistributed funds to be used toward implementing services has potential to mitigate homelessness across the country.

### Implementation

Since the proposed policy will affect communities across local, state, and federal levels, the actualization of public-private partnerships requires a top-down approach. While the bill will be enacted by Congress, HUD and HHS have authority to create the following regulations and

procedures to carry out the different partnerships. Initial steps should involve a collaboration of congressional committees, specifically the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations, Budget, Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, researching public organizations as well as state hospitals and private investors that have demonstrated capabilities in ESG goals and corporate social responsibility.<sup>12</sup> Since HUD has the capacity to grant funds dedicated to housing, this federal agency will issue the most capable partnerships with grants. To rally political engagement from representatives, the bill can be spearheaded by those especially involved in housing policies, such as Senators Edward Markey (D-MA) and Alex Padilla (D-CA). Together, both senators introduced the *Housing Alignment and Coordination of Critical and Effective Health Services (ACCESS) Act*, a legislation tackling the “intersecting crises of homelessness, mental health, and substance use disorder.”<sup>13</sup> This act directs secretaries of HHS, HUD, and the Treasury Department to connect Medicaid beneficiaries to housing-related services.<sup>14</sup> Having figures experienced in enacting legislation for housing issues and collective action between sectors can better promote this proposal. Additionally, a national conference should be held to clearly disclose understandable information about eligibility criteria, goals, timeline, and expected outcomes. After those interested apply for the grant, committees should review each application before HUD decides which partnerships to fund. While potential backlash includes concerns about private sectors’ motives and difficulty in obtaining

accurate data about organizations' legitimacies, these can be addressed through federal oversight and research into organizations' backgrounds before issuing grants. Additional backlash may come from House Representatives publicly opposed to increasing funding for federal programs, such as House Committee on the Budget Chair Jodey Arrington (R-TX), who introduced the "Limit, Save, and Grow Act," including massive spending cuts to HUD's programs.<sup>15</sup> However, political opposition can be addressed by emphasizing the non-partisan nature of social impact and the projected positive impact on the country's general welfare. The program's overall success can be measured by enacting post-implementation analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and potential adjustments. Such evaluation involves observing positive health outcomes, community integration, increased employment rates, and street outreaches; from these observations, policymakers can decide how to move around funding for sectors lacking visible improvements.

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# American POP-Culture: The United States Should Change Corn Subsidization

By Kiran O’Kelly, [ko355@cornell.edu](mailto:ko355@cornell.edu)

*To correct the severe environmental and health-related economic externalities within corn production, the United States should change the regulation and subsidization of yellow dent corn. Such corrections should prioritize nutritional value over ethanol production and promote more sustainable food systems.*

## Background

Before the 1970s, the United States limited the amount of corn grown each year, often taking land out of production.<sup>1</sup> The US Department of Agriculture was focused on limiting the amount of grain that was in the market, as limiting enabled small and medium-sized farms often run by families to generate profit and prevent themselves and the land from being overworking. As a result of the Department of Agriculture’s approach, small and medium-sized farms were able to maintain a more sustainable model of production. Furthermore, this sustainable production helped reduce unemployment among many farmers; however, this production came at a cost of limiting economic growth. In 1973, the new Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, stopped curtailing grain production quotas and implemented rapid expansion of the American agriculture system with corn at the forefront.<sup>1</sup>

America’s switch from conservative growth to rapid expansion was spurred by a desire to keep the average American’s standard of living rising in my perspective. Since World War II, Americans had been enjoying a better standard of living every year, but in the 1970s, strenuous trade relations with certain OPEC nations

threatened to halt the steady American progress. Butz rationalized that producing more corn could offset the increase in the prices of goods from other industries by decreasing the cost of domestic food products.<sup>2</sup> This balance created by Butz authorizing increased corn production led to a change in consumer expectation where American consumers felt more confident to spend money, thereby stimulating the economy. However, corn production continued to keep increasing, as ethanol was still being used as biofuel.<sup>3</sup> Corn produced for ethanol no longer needed to retain the same nutritional standards as it was not being consumed. This switch from corn being consumed to used as a fuel led to the yellow-dent variety, consisting mostly of starch and little protein, becoming a dominant monoculture. As the government changed corn’s purpose over time, corporations which could better mass-produce the grain began to take over small and medium-sized farms with little political resistance. Currently 90 million acres are being used for corn production, and family farms are replaced increasingly by corporate farms.<sup>3,11</sup> As climate change threatens the stability of food systems, the US government should reevaluate the

production of corn to better serve as a food rather than a fuel input.

## Policy Idea

The US government should increase subsidization of farms that have \$1,000,000 in gross cash farm income (GCFI) or less. GCFI includes income from commodity cash receipts, farm-related income, and government payments.<sup>4</sup> The government should also decrease the subsidization given to all other farms to bolster small and medium-sized family farms and limit the unfair advantage large and corporate farms have. The federal government should work with state governments to ensure that land is taken out of production in a rotation that never disproportionately affects certain states over others, especially those reliant on agriculture. Secondly, the US government should reduce any subsidies on ethanol and increase subsidies on different varieties of “indigenous corn,” which are more nutritional to both livestock and humans. The US government should then forbid more than 30% of subsidized corn from being used for seed oils or sweeteners like high fructose corn syrups (HFCS) and livestock feed that creates ulcers which require antibiotics.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the government should mandate that farms benefiting from government

subsidization must stop the usage of chemically corrosive herbicides and fertilizers. The subsidization of indigenous corn would help provide alternative smaller farms could choose from instead of there solely being available GMO corn strains that have been engineered by pharmaceutical companies that also produce agricultural chemical products.

### **Policy Analysis**

While implementing the proposed policy would be an uphill fight against the most powerful special-interest groups in the US, it would sow the seeds of a new era of American agriculture, an era of sustainability production that respects nature and farmers. This policy would enable family farms to compete and earn sustainable profits, promote a more nutritional type of corn that would decrease antibiotic reliance within the livestock industry, as well as serve as a more nutritious grain that has a healthy makeup of protein.<sup>6,7</sup>

According to Scientific American, \$90 billion were spent on subsidies for yellow dent corn between 1995 and 2010, with an annual average of around six billion dollars annually. Furthermore, regulating corn is important not only for its effects within the US but also because American corn exports have incredibly deep economic and health effects on other countries such as Mexico and Lesotho. These two countries are essentially starved by the US by a process known as dumping.<sup>8</sup> Dumping is where a country uses the United Nations as a means to sell overproduced and unwanted corn that holds very low nutritional value that cannot be sold domestically while also counting as aid. Corn being grown as a

monoculture and being grown at such a scale and exported in enormous numbers poses an enormous risk of environmental devastation domestically. Currently, 5.6 million tons of nitrogen are used on corn every year and much of this fertilizer leeches into nearby waterways. Furthermore, the usage of chemically corrosive herbicides have enabled over 1.3 million acres of prairie and grassland lost to corn production purposed for biofuel.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, such domestic devastation could result in a larger global supply chain failure that could result in a famine that could starve the globe.<sup>2,3,10</sup> American civilization has been built upon corn, and the future of corn will be decided by how we choose to value and treat corn. America's corn subsidization decides how a single plant will transform technology, the health of billions, America's socio-economic hierarchy, the global trade market, and environmental devastation.

### **Highlights**

- The US government should increase subsidization of farms that have \$1,000,000 in GCFI or less, decrease the subsidization given to farms larger to bolster small and medium family farms, and limit the unfair advantage large and corporate farms have.
- The US government should reduce any subsidies on ethanol and shift the \$6 billion allocated to yellow dent corn to subsidies on different varieties of "indigenous corn," which are more nutritional to both livestock and humans.

- The government should also create regulations forbidding more than 30% of subsidized corn from being used for seed oils or sweeteners like HFCS and livestock feed that creates ulcers, which require antibiotics.
- Finally, the government should mandate that farms benefiting from government subsidization must stop the usage of chemically corrosive herbicides and fertilizers using the environmental evidence that already exists in great abundance.

### **Implementation**

This policy would be best implemented through state government, particularly within heartland states, such as Iowa, Illinois, and Ohio. Iowa and Illinois alone produce the most corn in the US and account regularly for about one third of the US crop.<sup>11</sup> Family farms are the economic backbone of many of these states, and many representatives and senators from these states are mainly backed by farmers. Furthermore, there are representatives from these states on both sides of the aisle on the House Committee for Agriculture. If their constituents showed support to the state introduction of the policy, there is a strong likelihood many members of Congress would support the policy. Even in the Senate there have been pushes on both sides of the aisle from Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) to decrease government support to corporate mega farms and focus on uplifting smaller family farms. However, ethanol persists as a multi-billion-

dollar industry backed by agricultural and oil special-interest groups, as it offers a way for the oil industry to market itself as environmentally friendly through 10-15% ethanol petrol mixtures.<sup>12</sup> These special interest groups may dissuade politicians from making change, and therefore much of the support would need to come from the state or even local grassroot level to receive proper traction. Lastly, this policy would lessen the overall production of corn, which many policymakers may find unattractive, as it could be seen as going against the US's leadership in agricultural exportation. While this concern is valid, it is important to note that this policy would increase the long-term sustainability of much of American corn production which is incredibly important to the longevity of American family farms. The next step would be to create regulations that less than 30% of subsidized corn cannot be used for seed oils or sweeteners like HFCS and livestock feed that creates ulcers which require antibiotics.<sup>5</sup>

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# Expanding the Child Tax Credit in New York State

By Nguyen Vo, [ntv4@cornell.edu](mailto:ntv4@cornell.edu)

*To reverse the spike in child poverty following the expiration of the American Rescue Plan's temporary expansion of the federal Child Tax Credit, the New York state government should further expand its Empire State Child Credit program by passing Senate Bill 2023-S277A.*

## Background

From 2017 to 2020, the Child Tax Credit (CTC) was federally set at a maximum of \$2000 per child, with a phase-in provision that excluded low-income households due to changes under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, the American Rescue Plan eliminated the phase-in and increased the CTC refund to \$3600 per child under six and to \$3000 per child aged 6-17. This expansion led to a significant reduction in the child poverty rate in the United States from 9.7% to a record low of 5.2% using the supplemental poverty measure.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

However, the expanded CTC expired at the end of 2021 without a replacement, causing the child poverty rate to more than double to 12.4%.<sup>4,5</sup> If the expanded CTC had been kept in place, the child poverty rate in 2022 was expected to be only 8.1%.<sup>6</sup>

Child poverty is a salient issue in New York, which suffers from a 18.5% child poverty rate in 2022 – the tenth highest in the nation.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing the need for action, the state introduced an Empire State Child Credit of up to \$333 in the FY2024 budget to mitigate the impact of the federal CTC's phase-in.<sup>8</sup> However, more needs to be done to reverse child poverty trends.

## Policy Idea

The New York State Legislature should pass Senate Bill 2023-S277A for a prompt signature by Governor Hochul. The bill provides for a \$1500 refundable tax credit that would scale down to a minimum of \$500 as a household's income-per-child exceeds certain thresholds.<sup>9</sup> The rebate should still apply to households whose tax liabilities are lower than the amount due for refund. Unlike the present federal CTC, the bill lacks minimum income requirements, which allows for the neediest to receive the credit.<sup>9</sup> If passed and enacted, the bill would come into effect the following tax year, and rebates would be split into quarterly payments.<sup>9</sup>

## Policy Analysis

Analysis on the effects of a hypothetical CTC program in NY shows that expanding CTC confers large economic benefits that far outweigh its costs.<sup>10</sup> A state CTC program that provides \$1000 per child costs \$2.7 billion per year would generate a present-discounted net monetary benefit of \$26.2 billion per year for society, assuming an interest rate of 3%.<sup>10</sup> The same research finds that the same policy would recoup 70% of its spending from increased tax receipts, leaving a present-discounted annual deficit of \$826 million.<sup>10</sup> While this program is

structured differently from the \$1500 per child credit that S277A proposes, this research suggests that S277A's contribution to the annual state deficit would be lower than its \$4 billion per year price tag.

A progressive, expanded CTC along the lines of S277A would also improve health outcomes and reduce socioeconomic inequities. The 2021 tax credit expansion reduced household food insufficiency by 26%.<sup>11</sup> Its temporary closing of phase-in provisions also benefited the one-third of children whose families made too little to previously qualify.<sup>4</sup> The proposed policy would benefit families earning too little to be covered by current law, thereby improving health and financial outcomes for the neediest households.<sup>9</sup>

To offset the marginal increase in deficit from this policy, a small increase in revenue is necessary in the current fiscal environment. As New York suffers from a rising deficit and as inflation remains fairly high, a concomitant increase in taxes would counteract the policy's impact on both the deficit and inflation.

## Highlights

- The child poverty rate in 2022 rose to 12.4% after the American Rescue Plan's expansion of the Child Tax Credit expired.<sup>4,5</sup> If the

expanded CTC had been kept in place, the child poverty rate in 2022 was expected to be only 8.1%.<sup>6</sup>

- New York suffers from a 18.5% child poverty rate in 2022 – the 10th-highest in the nation.<sup>7</sup>
- Senate Bill 2023-S277A provides for a \$1500 tax rebate that would scale down as a household’s income-per-child exceeds certain thresholds.<sup>9</sup>
- A state CTC program that provides \$1000 per child costs \$2.7 billion per year would generate a present-discounted net monetary benefit of \$26.2 billion per year for society, assuming an interest rate of 3%.<sup>10</sup> The marginal increase in deficit from this policy can be counteracted by a concomitant increase in revenue.
- A progressive expansion of New York’s child tax credit system would stimulate long-term economic growth, improve health outcomes, and reduce socioeconomic inequities.<sup>4,10,11</sup>

## Implementation

The bill can be popular among families, and passing it can be portrayed as urgent because of the deteriorating child poverty situation in New York. However, the impetus to pass this bill may be reduced by the fact that the Empire State Child Credit is already included in next year’s budget.<sup>12</sup> Proponents of the bill must successfully argue that the measures in place are insufficient to safeguard children and can be improved by being expanded.

To ensure that 2023-S277A is considered by the state legislature and supported by the public, attempts should be made to gain support among both the college-educated youth, who tend to favor social safety nets but are less benefited by the policy, and families with children, who are less amenable to high taxes and spending in New York State but will see large benefits from the policy. Stakeholders should portray it both as a progressive initiative that helps the needy, and as a pro-family policy that improves the well-being of households with children.

Support for this bill may be further dampened by New York’s worsening fiscal position. To maintain fiscal soundness and counteract the inflationary pressures from families having more disposable income, the state could consider levying additional taxes on consumption, with sales tax hikes and congestion pricing being potential sources of revenue growth. Given the recent failure of an attempt to widen the scope of New York’s sales taxation, however, other options such as public services’ fee increases or income tax increases for the top bracket should also be considered.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, explicitly tying the CTC expansion to tax increases runs the risk of eroding public support for the bill. To overcome these issues, proponents of coupling the CTC expansion with revenue-raising policies can term the latter as necessary counters to the state’s rising budget deficit in general, instead of as a balancing measure for the cost of 2023-S277A specifically.<sup>14</sup>

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# Own Our Own Information: Federal Data Privacy Regulation in the Pharmaceutical Industry

By Gary Wu, [gzw3@cornell.edu](mailto:gzw3@cornell.edu)

*To protect sensitive and proprietary data and to establish a formal list of data privacy rights, the United States federal government should modernize its data privacy regulations.*

## Background

In 2018, the European Union (EU) enacted the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the world's most comprehensive data privacy regulation, setting a benchmark for privacy laws later developed in Australia, Brazil, Canada, among others.<sup>1,2</sup> On the federal level, the United States' data privacy laws lag behind those of other countries with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 being the last one enacted.<sup>3</sup> As a result, states like California, Colorado, Connecticut, Utah, and Virginia have begun to enact their own data privacy laws with California's Consumer Privacy Act of 2018 (CCPA) being the strictest in the country.<sup>3</sup> The CCPA provides consumers the right to know exactly what data companies are collecting as well as to whom it might be sent and to delete their data at any time. However, other legislation, like Virginia's Consumer Data Protection Act, fail to offer the same protections, such as for employee and commercial contexts or information posted publicly on social media.<sup>4</sup> The lack of data protection laws and the increasing number of cyberattacks on the pharmaceutical industry poses a threat to both consumers and companies alike. Furthermore, the number of phishing attempts increased by 189% between 2020

and 2021, with over half of the breaches involving third-party vendors storing confidential and proprietary data.<sup>5</sup> According to IBM's 2023 data breach report, the cost of a single data breach in the healthcare industry as a whole nears \$11 million and nearly \$5 million for pharmaceutical companies.<sup>6</sup> Although sweeping data privacy legislation like the GDPR have pushed corporate compliance and cybersecurity innovation, clarity of what the law states is vital, as after its enactment, confusion stalled 40 cancer studies and 5,000 collaborative scientific studies.<sup>7,8</sup>

## Policy Idea

The United States federal government should implement a data privacy protection decree to ensure that specific rights such as the right to be informed, have access, rectification, be forgotten, among others. Furthermore, the aforementioned changes would require businesses to hire data protection officers and conduct privacy impact assessments to report the steps taken to protect confidential information in the event of a data breach. The goal is to ensure that all consumers, especially those with sensitive personal health and biometric data have the necessary protection over their data and ability to remove their data if they deem it necessary.

## Policy Analysis

The implementation of a strict data privacy framework in the pharmaceutical industry presents a complex interplay of economic costs and considerations. Notably, the healthcare industry already spent 10% of its IT budget on cybersecurity. The implementation of the EU's GDPR resulted in the healthcare industry having an estimated spending increase of 13 billion euros.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, failing to adhere to the proposed guidelines would result in fines amounting to 4% of their global annual turnover. A study by PwC found that 40% of firms abiding by these provisions spent over \$10 million each on compliance efforts, and another study by EY reported that companies averaged an additional \$1.3 million per year.<sup>10</sup> Another study found that strict data privacy regulation such as the legislation California enacted was found to decrease venture capital investments by \$3.4 million per week and resulted in job losses totaling a range from 3,000 to 30,000.<sup>11</sup> Further analysis found that the upfront costs of implementing sweeping data privacy regulation compared to its output has a 14:1 cost to benefits ratio.<sup>10</sup> However, with these costs comes major benefits for consumers that are difficult to quantify but offset the initial upfront costs. Investment in

implementing spam filters, access controls, cloud storage, multi-factor authentication, hiring a Data Protection Officer, and conducting a Data Privacy Impact Assessment all work to put rights back into the hands of vulnerable clinical trial participants and drive improved cyber-security measures across the industry.<sup>12</sup>

### Highlights

- According to IBM's 2023 data breach report, the cost of a single data breach in 2023 in the healthcare industry as a whole nears 11 million USD and nearly 5 million USD for pharmaceutical companies.<sup>6</sup>
- A study by PwC found that 40% of firms abiding by these provisions spent over \$10 million each on compliance efforts and another study by EY reported that companies averaged \$1.3 million per year on top of that.<sup>10</sup>
- Investment in implementing spam filters, access controls, cloud storage, multi factor authentication, hiring a Data Protection Officer, and conducting a Data Privacy Impact Assessment all work to put rights back into the hands of vulnerable clinical trial participants and offsets initial costs.<sup>12</sup>

### Implementation

A comprehensive data protection decree could be implemented through three main steps. The first is to push back against the influence of Big Tech and groups such as TechNet and the Internet Association.<sup>13,14</sup> With control over almost all information

that passes through the internet, Amazon, Meta, and Google have spent a combined \$50 million lobbying at the federal level against data privacy laws.<sup>15</sup> Mobilizing consumer advocacy groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation or the Digital Privacy Alliance could increase public awareness and counteract lobbying efforts made by Big Tech groups. The second step is to identify and influence members of Congress who have a track record of supporting enhanced data privacy measures. Members of Congress like Roger Wicker (R-MA) advocate for this policy in the Senate and Frank Pallone (D-NJ) push in the House could help maintain bipartisan support on this issue, as both have previously supported enhanced data privacy protections via the American Data Privacy and Protection Act.<sup>16</sup> Finally, each company that collects confidential or proprietary data must hire a Data Protection Officer who would monitor internal compliance, assess potential data breach risks, and implement measures to encrypt all personal data.<sup>17</sup> In addition, to ensure compliance with this legislation, a federal agency should be established to assess whether companies implement these protocols. When these protocols are violated, fines should be imposed to prevent further infringement. Global precedent for extensive data privacy laws already exists with countries around the world and several states have already implemented their own versions of what protections are necessary. Although research from these existing programs shows that there are significant upfront and annual costs associated with data privacy laws, enacting the proposed policy

would ensure that consumers, employees, and trial participants gain the right to know how their data is being stored, for what purposes, and to remove it at their discretion.

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# EDUCATION POLICY

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# Mandating 30-Minute School Lunch Periods to Improve Nutritional Equity in Virginia Schools

By Reagan Allvin, [rra49@cornell.edu](mailto:rra49@cornell.edu)

*In Virginia, there is no minimum time period set for school lunches, and students of low-income families pay the price. Rushing through what may be the only reliable meal for some is linked to consuming smaller and less nutritious portions. Through mandating an extended designated school lunch period, the state of Virginia can protect underserved youth and reduce its food waste footprint.*

## Background

Virginia's most vulnerable children rely on school lunch to meet their daily nutrition needs, with 45.1% of children in Virginia being eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch.<sup>1</sup> Children's consumption of school lunches make up 30-50% of their total daily caloric intake.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when this major meal is insufficient, students who depend on lunch time for energy in the classroom are left behind. According to a national poll, one in five parents of elementary school students report their child having less than 15 minutes to eat their lunch, with children having as few as seven minutes to eat in some schools.<sup>3,4</sup> In a study of students in the state of New York, out of all students who picked out a vegetable to eat, only 24% took a single bite of the vegetable during lunch.<sup>5</sup> Researchers attributed this to a multitude of environmental factors in the cafeteria, including insufficient lunch times of less than 30 minutes.<sup>5</sup> Students with less than 15 minutes to eat their lunch consume fewer calories and less sufficient fiber in their meals than those who get more time, according to a study measuring the food remaining on discarded trays and the time during which students were able to get food from the cafeteria.<sup>6</sup>

Compared to those who get 25 minutes or more, those who get 20 minutes to eat consume 13% less of their entrées, 12% less of their vegetables, and 10% less of their milk.<sup>7</sup> In another, more recent trial, students with 20 or more seated lunch minutes were found to consume more calories, carbohydrates, dietary fiber, protein, iron, and potassium than those with just 10 minutes.<sup>8</sup> As a result of shorter lunch times, children lack proper nutrition which can also have consequences in the classroom. Students who consume more fruits, vegetables, and micronutrients score higher on memory and intelligence tests.<sup>1</sup> Insufficient meal times may impact not only students' physiological wellbeing but also their academic performance.

This issue expands beyond the student; insufficient school lunch times may lead to a crisis of food waste. An estimated 530,000 tons of food are wasted in US schools each year, costing the US \$1.7 billion annually.<sup>2</sup> In addition, 44% of school kitchen managers list "not enough time to eat" as a possible cause of plate waste.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, limited school lunch times have a wide range of consequences, making change increasingly necessary.

## Policy Idea

To address the urgent need for regulated, mandated lunch times, the Virginia state government should edit existing legislation. Section 150(A) of chapter 131 of the Virginia State Board of Education legislation describes time limits and minimums for recess and instruction time. This section should be edited to include the requirement that "Students must be provided with a minimum of 30 minutes to be seated and eat lunch after the meal is served."

## Policy Analysis

Nearby states and territories such as Washington DC and West Virginia have already implemented mandatory school lunch period times to ensure adequate time to consume a full meal for students, especially those in high-need districts.<sup>9</sup> Both programs have been in effect since 2018, indicating that this mandate is likely to maintain similar longevity in Virginia as well.

It is crucial to track the effectiveness of this mandate without impeding on schools. The mandate's success can be measured through secondary measures such as tracking the existing food on discarded trays for a given week in a representative selection of schools across the state. In a recent study,

longer seated lunch times led to significantly less fruit and vegetable waste.<sup>4</sup> Measuring existing plate waste allows for a minimally invasive yet accurate examination of how lunch times impact how much food and what kinds of food students discard. A less direct measure of the program's success can be conducted through comparing test scores before and after the mandate's implementation. However, changes in test scores could be due to any number of factors, so a more effective way to measure the impact of the mandate on academic performance would be to implement this mandate in pilot form through a representative sample of schools in the state for a year. At the end of the year, test scores can be cross-referenced to observe if there was a significant impact, particularly for students who partake in free or reduced-price school lunch programs.

### Highlights

Virginia's most vulnerable children rely on school lunch for sustenance.

- An estimated 45.1% of children in Virginia are eligible for free or reduced school lunch.<sup>1</sup>
- School lunches comprise 30-50% of children's daily calorie intake.<sup>2</sup>

Short lunch periods prevent consumption of essential nutrients.

- According to a national poll, one in five parents of elementary school students report their child having less than 15 minutes to eat their lunch, some having as little as seven.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Young students in New York State were shown to seldom finish eating their vegetables. Researchers

owed this to a multitude of environmental factors in the cafeteria, including insufficient lunch times.<sup>5</sup>

- Students with less time to eat their lunch consume fewer nutrients in their meals than those who have sufficient time.<sup>6,8</sup>
- Compared to those who get 25 minutes or more, those who get 20 minutes to eat prioritize the less nutritious parts of the meal.<sup>7</sup>

Undernutrition of Virginia's youth is a costly challenge.

- Approximately 30.8% of children in Virginia do not eat fruit daily, and 51.8% do not eat vegetables daily.<sup>10</sup>
- Poor diet costs the United States \$50.4 billion in health care costs annually.<sup>11</sup>

### Implementation

The proposed legislative change, while encompassing significant ripple effects, is not likely to strike massive controversy in the Virginia House of Delegates. Though accessible school nutrition programs have typically received less support from conservative-majority states, Virginia's Republican governor, Glenn Youngkin, signed off on a new budget in 2022, expanding access to free school lunches to those who qualify for reduced-price lunches in 2022.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Virginia's passing of this legislation could pave the way for equitable school lunch policies in even the most conservative states, and would make Virginia one of only 14 states with any legislation expanding access to free lunches past those who strictly qualify for them.<sup>15</sup> That said, House Bill 1967, a bill proposing universal free lunches, was killed in

Virginia's House Pre-K-12 Education Subcommittee in a 5-3 vote.<sup>16,17</sup> All five "nay" votes were from Republican legislators, while the three "yea" votes came from Democrats, indicating that bipartisan appeal may be necessary for future school lunch legislation to be passed.

However, legislation regarding the timing of school lunch periods is likely to be less politically contentious than House Bill 1967, which is a much larger financial undertaking. It is for this reason that the proposed legislative change is a more politically feasible action step in the direction of ensuring sufficient nutrition for all children. Bipartisan support for this concept can be observed in the passing of 2005's Act No. 102 in South Carolina.<sup>18</sup> This act mandated a minimum of 20 minutes for elementary school students to eat lunch, and gained broad support in a state that has a similar political climate to Virginia as of 2023.<sup>19,20,21</sup> Additionally, the 2007 Healthy Students Act in Mississippi and the 2004 Act Concerning Childhood Nutrition in Schools, Recess, and Lunch Breaks in Connecticut are similar bills that have succeeded in other states.<sup>22,23</sup> More recently, New Mexico has signed into law Senate Bill 4, which mandates 20 minutes of seated lunch time alongside universal free school lunches.<sup>24</sup>

If, following the passing of the proposed statutory changes, student health and performance are tracked alongside improved lunch consumption by an outside research council, that data can be used as evidence of the need for universal and unconditional access to this resource.

To apply pressure to legislators and attract the support of

constituents, the support of advocacy groups is crucial. No Kid Hungry Virginia, for instance, is the state branch of a national advocacy group aiming to end child hunger in the United States.<sup>25</sup> It has a history of advocating for school-meal related policies, such as expanding access to summer meal programs to rural communities.<sup>26</sup>

Through advocacy and garnering political support, it is possible to make time for school lunches, and with it, more equitable school environments.

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# Redistributing Funding from Wealthy Public School Districts to Low-Income School Districts

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*Gaps in public school funding are prevalent throughout the country, making the unequal distribution of school funding one of the most pressing issues facing the American education system today. Congress should increase federal education funding and redistribute district funding to ensure every student receives an equitable education.*

## Background

Across the United States, millions of educators and students face significant education disparities.<sup>1</sup> Inadequate education funding creates learning barriers and denies students the opportunity to receive an equal education. School districts in wealthier neighborhoods have access to stable learning environments, highly qualified teachers, guidance counselors, and various extracurricular activities. In contrast, schools in lower-income neighborhoods have larger class sizes, fewer advanced courses, and inexperienced teachers. The federal government's lack of sufficient fund distribution creates inequalities in public education, forcing states to rely on property taxes to fund school districts.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the economic or tax base of the area, local communities use property taxes to determine the funding each school receives. Because of this, social class has become the most significant determinant of receiving a high-quality education.<sup>3</sup> Students from wealthier areas have the advantage of increased district funding and resources. In comparison, students from poorer areas are denied the resources that enable them to succeed in school and beyond.<sup>4</sup> Performance gaps exist between children with

different socioeconomic statuses, reflecting the unmet educational needs of students living in lower-income areas.<sup>5</sup> These performance gaps emphasize the widespread education disparities caused by inadequate federal funding and the state's reliance on property taxes to fund public schools. Furthermore, the federal government currently puts only 12.7% of the federal budget towards education, which is well below the international average of 15%.<sup>6</sup> Given the limited distribution of federal funds and local districts' reliance on property taxes to compensate, there is dramatically different funding among public schools.<sup>7</sup>

## Policy Idea

Congress should implement a mandate that redistributes local district-based education funds from wealthy school districts to low-income ones. The distribution of funds should be allocated to early childhood, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education programs. The allocation of funds should take district enrollment and average area income into account. Student characteristics, such as learning disabilities, honors programs, special needs, and English as a Second Language programs, should also be considered, given the need for

increased funding for specific students with different learning needs. Public schools with higher enrollment numbers and lower average area income should receive more allocated funds to compensate for the low property taxes put toward district funding. In addition to redistributing funds, the government should increase and distribute federal investments in education from the federal budget to aid in redistributing property taxes. Congress should approve increased federal education funding and enforce the redistribution of school district wealth to guarantee students the right to equitable education.

## Policy Analysis

Policies that close the gaps between wealthy and low-income public school districts are vital in creating more equitable educational opportunities for students nationwide. Studies from the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance show that low-income students, on average, have unequal access to higher-performing teachers, which has detrimental effects on overall student achievement.<sup>14</sup> This past summer, President Biden announced that his administration would promote educational opportunities under the US Department of Education to help

students overcome academic challenges presented by unequal high school education and financial status.<sup>13</sup> Without this government intervention, educational opportunities for all Americans will remain bound by their financial limitations.

By allotting more federal funding for education, districts will not be forced to rely as heavily on property taxes to fund schools, minimizing the chance of obtaining unequal funds, especially for schools within the same state.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, inequality can be minimized by implementing a federal mandate enacting pure income redistribution. Straight income redistribution through tax, cash, and income transfers has been proven to keep inequality in check, effectively addressing disparities between wealthy and poor neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> Brazil's Bolsa Familia CCT (conditional cash transfer) Program demonstrates this success by achieving reduced levels of inequality and hunger by redistributing wealth.<sup>8</sup> If similar redistribution strategies are executed, equivalent results regarding education are expected.

Implementing national equitable funding for public school districts can ensure students receive an equal, quality education, which can act as a leveler in society. Reports show that education can close gaps in wealth inequality by reducing poverty and boosting opportunities for access to higher education for all citizens.”

### Highlights

- Wealth inequality in America has created significant educational disparities, causing low-

income students to face learning barriers and decreased access to quality education, contributing to inadequate learning outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

- The federal government's insufficient allocation of education funds forces local districts to rely on property taxes to fund public schools, causing neighborhoods with varying income statuses to receive significantly different and unequal public school funding.<sup>2</sup>
- Redistributing district funds and increasing federal funding for education can enable school districts nationwide to obtain more equitable funding, preventing students' education from being predetermined by their economic status.<sup>11</sup>
- Equal educational opportunities can help combat economic inequality by reducing poverty, allowing students access to higher education, and increasing social mobility.<sup>12</sup>

### Implementation

Considering the partisan polarization in Congress currently, especially regarding affirmative action, an executive mandate is necessary to redistribute public school funds rather than passing legislation. Before issuing the mandate, the president should test this policy to empirically validate the benefits of the reallocation of wealth on inequality.

Given that education is a state and local issue, Executive Order 13985, which includes the

US Department of Education's Equity Action Plan, should be amended to include this proposed funding redistribution.<sup>16</sup> This order aims to advance equity and support for underserved communities. The implementation of alternative reforms for education funding, including the Education Stabilization Fund, has been successful under this plan by increasing the quality of education in public schools and helping schools recover after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, under the Every Student Succeeds Act, the federal program Title I currently allocates funds to educational facilities with impoverished student bodies.<sup>17</sup> The federal government should bolster the funds distributed under Title I on a larger scale to aid in the redistribution mandate.

Furthermore, President Biden recently proposed his budget request for the 2024 fiscal year, which included an increase to the Department of Education's elementary and secondary education budget by almost 14%. The budget includes funds for districts nationwide, especially in low-income, marginalized areas. If Congress approves this funding, President Biden should mandate that federal funds be combined with state funds and property tax dollars to redistribute them. To ensure the funds are distributed accurately, the president should direct the Department of Education to allocate the funds based on the needs detailed above. This method will ensure more direct impacts on equitable education funding and fewer obstacles brought forth by a divided Congress.

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# College Sustainability Rankings: Oversight and Criteria for Measurable Impact

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*The Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) lacks the level of oversight and objectivity that an effective and trustworthy ranking system needs. The STARS system should include quantitative data and analysis through a neutral governing body.*

## Background

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) has labeled its STARS reporting scheme as “a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance.”<sup>1</sup> However, the system lacks accountability as the quality of data submissions is only assessed by AASHE staff.

An institution’s score is based on the percentage of points it earns out of 205 possible point “credits” across the categories of Academics, Engagement, Operations, and Planning & Administration.<sup>2</sup> It is of note that a heavy emphasis is placed on academics, with 14 points attainable for an “academic courses” credit and 12 points for “research and scholarship”; Combined, these comprise nearly 13% of total credits possible.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the Operations category’s highest point-earning credits are Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Waste Diversion with only 8 points available for each, together making up less than 8% of the total points available.<sup>2</sup> The scoring system awards its highest rating, the STARS Platinum Rating, to schools which earn 85% of the points available in credit categories applicable to their institution. Thus, an Platinum-

ranked institution like Cornell University, which earned 57.48 out of 58 total credits in the Academics category and only 43.81 of 70 total credits in the Operations category, can still be considered “sustainable.”<sup>3</sup>

UCF researchers outlined structural issues with STARS and noted that STARS “lacks strong performative measurements” and thus “fail[s] to accurately measure sustainability.”<sup>4</sup> The researchers propose basing STARS’ operational sustainability standards on those of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), the global leader in green building ratings.<sup>5</sup> The same UCF study determined that LEED employs nearly double the amount of operational performance markers as STARS, with 62.7% of total LEED credits for sustainability benchmarks being in categories relating to operational improvements compared to 32.7% of STARS credits.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, there is one point available for a “Reporting Assurance” credit for institutions submitting a first-time report or attempting to receive a higher rating than previously earned.<sup>5</sup> Obtaining this credit requires either internal review from a university employee not involved in the reporting process or assessment by an external auditing organization.

There are myriad issues with this attempt at oversight as it is an optional credit that, if pursued, makes up less than 0.5% of an institution’s score.<sup>2</sup>

## Policy Idea

Future versions of STARS should include data assurance from external auditors in government or business. AASHE administrators should have to develop additional sustainability benchmarking criteria with quantifiable environmental impacts. These should include impact analysis strategies from traditional Environmental Impact Reviews.<sup>6</sup> New criteria should include measurements such as greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, and noise, air, and water quality around campuses. Analysts should also account for efficiency, renewables, land use considerations, and carbon sequestration.

These benchmarks should be considered in relation to an institution’s past mitigation efforts, compliance with federal and state standards, and implementation of green technology. Crucially, any involved regulatory oversight body should consider the availability of environmental mitigation resources and appropriate use in assessing the ability of a given institution to meet these criteria. AASHE should enlist either a government entity, like the EPA’s Science Advisory Board

(SAB) or Office of Mission Support (OMS), or an ESG-specific department at a private auditing company like PwC or Deloitte to ensure accuracy and relevancy of STARS reports.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup> AASHE's available funding and preferred timelines should determine whether STARS employs public or private aid.

### Policy Analysis

In ESG assessments, many of which use methodology similar to that of STARS, there are issues with transparency, corruptibility, and specificity.<sup>11</sup> These can only be addressed through strategy, disclosure, and engagement practices based on compliance, reputation, and cost of capital.

With 348 institutions currently participating in three-year cycles, updating STARS to include additional focus on oversight and operations will incur a lengthy implementation process.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, AASHE should phase in the recommended practices. Implementation will require time and capital investments as AASHE negotiates with consulting analysts. However, an in-house quality assurance program would over-exert existing staff members, while the proposed method supports employee morale and quality of life. In-house assessment could be more financially feasible but would require hiring experts or giving current employees raises based on added responsibilities. Finding an outside agency requires resources but ensures that the job is done well.

This system may be more equitable for schools with less bandwidth for hiring and training faculty as curriculum currently accounts for a large portion of total

points. It may be less equitable for schools with less funding for retrofitting and new construction costs, as measurable criteria necessitate operational improvements. Oversight and neutrality will contribute to an overall more equitable system since less subjectivity is involved.

Incentives significantly improve climate outcomes.<sup>13</sup> Reliable, in-depth sustainability ratings can provide a reputational advantage to institutions that measurably reduce their negative environmental impacts. Combining the strong desire to change with quantitative standards will tangibly reduce climate and environmental harm. Analyzing the emissions, efficiency, and pollution outputs of participating schools will provide insight into group and individual progress toward set goals.

### Highlights

- Proposal enhances the Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) by introducing quantitative criteria and neutral oversight for colleges and universities.
- Highlights deficiencies in STARS's current structure, drawing on research suggesting it lacks strong performative measurements and fails to accurately measure sustainability.
- Suggests incorporating measures such as greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, air and water quality, and land use considerations, with oversight from a neutral governing body for accurate data verification.

- Emphasizes the shift towards measurable standards to boost the credibility of STARS, providing a more effective and trustworthy framework for promoting sustainability practices in higher education institutions.

### Implementation

This program will have a relatively low cost of implementation. If a government agency assumes oversight, the funding should come from grants and governmental budgets. If not, AASHE should come up with the funding to find and pay a consulting or auditing firm through donors, grants, or investors.

Sustainability-linked actions are generally favorable in the current political climate, based on a Pew Research poll in which respondents cited community impacts and lack of government action as their main points of reference.<sup>14</sup> This proposal is unlikely to be politically controversial. Although STARS has been in use for over a decade, its existence is insignificant to the general public. As such, this plan will mainly affect the attitudes of stakeholders already involved in higher education and sustainability. For campus administrators currently involved in the reporting process, outside oversight and assessment will likely be welcome. However, the proposed changes will slow the reporting process and add more rigorous standards.

Success will be measured in terms of damage mitigation and emissions reduction. It is especially relevant that this proposal emphasizes the quantifiable impact of internal regulatory decisions.

Shifting towards measurable standards across categories like energy, land use, and pollution will make this definition of success possible. To ensure that the policy executes its intended effects, STARS must track the emissions reports from the first cycle of participants using the updated version to assess whether each institution has improved and by what margin.

Assessing the success of oversight policies may be more difficult because there are no definitive measurements for such a change. However, surveying users of the STARS system before and after implementing changes may provide insight into the effectiveness and efficiency of any updates. The survey should include data points such as perceived impact and ease of use.

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# Establishing a Free Peer Tutoring Program for NYC Elementary School Students

By Jaiden Fisher-Dayn, [jf884@cornell.edu](mailto:jf884@cornell.edu)

*The increasing gaps in reading and math proficiency as well as extreme educational disparities in NYC are a cause for action. Implementing a city-wide, peer tutoring program, is a cost-effective initiative for elementary students to be tutored and mentored by high school students.*

## Background

Recent studies on students in NYC public education highlight significant racial disparities and deficiencies in math and reading proficiency. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, in 2022, reading and math proficiencies of elementary school students in NYC are lower than the state and national average.<sup>1</sup> In 2023, only 50% of NYC public school students were considered proficient in both math and reading.<sup>2</sup> The racial disparities in educational performance were also alarming. According to the Chancellor of the Department of Education David Banks, 64% of Black students and 63% of Latino students are not reading at grade level, while only 33% of white students are not proficient in reading.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, NYC school demographics have been shaped by segregation trends, which have persisted despite efforts to diversify schools. Today, the total number of children who are in the NYC school system is approximately 41% Latino, 24% Black, and only 15% White.<sup>4</sup> However, over 80% of Black students and over 70% of Latino students attend schools where more than 90% of their classmates are students of color, while 34% of White students are enrolled in schools that are predominantly White.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous studies have pointed to the relationship between academic performance and economic and racial school segregation.<sup>6</sup> Schools' poverty levels can affect teacher quality, (in)stability of school environment and incidents of conflicts and violence, levels of parental involvement, and quality of student-teacher interactions.<sup>7</sup> School diversity, in turn, is associated with increased social mobility, civic engagement, and academic success.<sup>8</sup>

In 2020, the NYC mayor implemented new rules for high school admissions, aimed at increasing school integration.<sup>9</sup> Additional changes were made in 2022.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, students have not yet recovered from the pandemic-related learning loss, exacerbating challenges for those who had already been suffering from math and literacy proficiency. Additional academic and social support is thus needed to ensure that all students in NYC achieve academic proficiencies, irrespective of race or economic status.

## Policy Idea

New York City should implement a citywide peer tutoring program to enhance educational improvement and community engagement. Such a program would aim to form partnerships between

NYC high schools and Title I or other elementary schools that wish to participate. Students from partner high schools will tutor elementary students in English and Math subjects in small groups. Establishing collaborative and meaningful partnerships across schools will not only offer elementary school students academic support and mentorship but can also be part of citywide integration efforts.

## Policy Analysis

The effectiveness of both professional and peer tutoring are supported by research, which states that nonprofessional tutors still have significant positive impacts on kids.<sup>11</sup> According to a report from the Brookings Institute, more than 80% of the 96 examined studies demonstrate statistically significant influence of tutoring on positive academic outcomes; one study highlighting that a student initially performing at the 50th percentile would advance to the 66th percentile with the aid of tutoring.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the impact of tutoring is most effective at the earlier grades. Tutoring in reading is particularly impactful in earlier elementary years, while math tutoring has strong effects on upper elementary grades.<sup>13</sup>

The effectiveness of tutoring is closely tied to the tutor's

competence and dedication. Tutor training is an important factor, with increase in training yielding more substantial learning improvements.<sup>14</sup> Small-group learning in particular is beneficial for students. One study concluded that kindergarten students increased their performance on standardized tests by four percentile points in the first year students attended small classes, and this test score advantage continued to expand in the subsequent years.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a study from the American Journal of Education indicated that students of all backgrounds have greater advantages in subsequent grades when they have exposure to smaller class sizes during their early education.<sup>16</sup> Professor Alan B. Krueger concluded that class size had a larger effect for minority students and those who receive free lunch.<sup>17</sup> While decreasing class sizes is a great and expensive challenge in New York City, creating small peer tutoring groups has many of the similar advantages. An effective peer tutoring group would occur in groups of four or fewer students, as individualized instruction allows students to increase engagement, boost confidence, and learn at their own pace. Creating a consistent and supportive relationship between a tutor and a student maximizes efficiency and when implemented correctly, is highly effective. While high-quality tutoring is an expensive initiative, implementing a peer tutoring program offers a cost-efficient alternative. Funding would mostly be needed for supplies and tutoring training, rather than finding professional tutors.

## Highlights

- The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened education disparities, where 2022 standardized math scores have experienced a record high drop.<sup>18</sup> Students of lower socioeconomic status are a significant contributor to these trends. Additionally, only about 50% of NYC students are proficient in both math and reading in 2023.<sup>19</sup> These trends highlight the urgent need to address the educational disparities.
- Racial disparities and segregation within the NYC education system continue to persist, with over 8 in 10 Black students attending schools in which over 90% of classmates are students of color. Both rigorous admissions screening and zoning segregation contribute to the socioeconomic inequities in schools.<sup>20</sup>
- A cost-effective alternative to traditional tutoring, the peer tutoring program establishes partnerships between high schools and elementary/middle schools, fostering academic support and mentorship in small groups to enhance education and community engagement. This approach inspires student initiative, promotes community service engagement, and facilitates a supportive environment for students to receive tutoring and mentorship.

## Implementation

Successful implementation of the peer tutoring program requires robust planning and oversight, as well as buy-in from families and school staff. NYC should first launch a pilot initiative at a select number of high schools and elementary schools. Both recipient and tutor-providing schools should have staff supervisors. Tutors providing schools should also select student leaders who will help with the roll out and the day-to-day activities of the program. Together with staff supervisors, high school tutors should participate in a tutor training program. A collaboration of university teaching faculties (e.g. Columbia University's Teachers College) could support designing the training programs. High school student leaders and staff supervisors at both schools should host a parent meeting at the partner elementary school during which parents can ask questions and give recommendations in an open forum setting. This approach is imperative to ensure that high school students are perceived not as saviors but as partners and a support system for their children's educational needs. Having parental input and involvement will increase the trust in, and success of, the program.

While funding is limited, the city can calculate estimated costs through this pilot program. After one year, the results of the pilot program should be analyzed and leveraged to encourage participation from other schools. Mobilizing support for the program should take place through PTA meetings, school newsletters, school affiliated groups, and public advertising. This program should be introduced at the city government level with the

intention of expanding its scope. For legislative consideration and potential implementation beyond NYC, this proposal should be presented to members in the Education Committee of the New York State Senate.

Potential backlash and challenges may arise in several areas. Foremost, there may be disagreement in allocation of resources. This program is only successful if both students and staff members commit extra time out of the school day to ensure success. There may be some backlash to fund a program that is unprecedented in NYC. To address this concern, it is crucial to emphasize how cost-effective peer tutoring is, as well as the program's long-term benefits. There may also be backlash from parents and teachers who don't believe their students need tutoring.

Clear communication is needed to highlight that the program's aim is to serve as a support system and not to take over the job of teachers. Professional tutoring services might express resistance, perceiving the peer tutoring program as insufficient. However, unlike professional tutoring, peer tutoring provides benefits beyond academic support, including mentorship and community engagement. There may also be concerns about the quality of tutoring provided by high school students. These, however, can be addressed by implementing a robust training program for student tutors and consistent monitoring of their performance.

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# Reimagining Seventh Grade Health Class: Introducing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to the Classroom

By Ben Nusbaum, [bbn24@cornell.edu](mailto:bbn24@cornell.edu)

*The New York State legislature should implement Cognitive behavioral therapy into 7th grade health class curricula to equip students with tools to manage bullying in schools, the raging teen mental health epidemic, and teach positive life habits.*

## Background

Preventing bullying in schools is a nationwide challenge. Many students resort to bullying because they don't know how to control their emotions and simply haven't been taught critical behavioral skills.<sup>1</sup> According to Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center, 50% of young people aged 9-12 and 20% of all students reported being bullied in school.<sup>2</sup> However, as students grow older, another pressing issue emerges: mental health. According to the CDC, students' mental health has continued to worsen since 2011, with 42% of high school students feeling persistently sad or hopeless in 2021 and more than 22% of students seriously considering attempting suicide. A shocking 10% of high schoolers in 2021 did attempt suicide.<sup>3</sup> Despite recent pushes for awareness, the stigma surrounding mental health stops many people from seeking help. A survey commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation polled over 2,500 people who had mental health issues and found that 28% of men and 19% of women did not seek help even when they knew they needed it.<sup>4</sup> Therapy does not have to be a responsive measure; instead, it can be proactive. One option is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

(CBT). CBT is a form of talk therapy that detects people's harmful behaviors and finds ways to help change them. A controlled clinical trial by PubMed revealed that 60 percent of people aged 11-21 treated with CBT for anxiety disorders recover with a sizable decrease in symptoms, proving CBT successful for children.<sup>5,6</sup> One place students could be taught these new cognitive skills is in schools. Many students have health classes in seventh grade where they learn about topics ranging from reproductive anatomy to sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>7</sup> The issue with this curriculum is that – despite a basic knowledge of mental health issues – it does not actually give students a means of addressing their own mental health problems or even a method of expressing their feelings healthfully.

## Policy Idea

The New York State legislature should implement Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) into seventh grade health curricula in New York State. In order to enact this program, health teachers would need to be trained in CBT. The Association of Psychological Therapies leads a 3-day course in the CBT essentials that is approved by the American

Psychological Association but is geared towards existing mental health professionals.<sup>8</sup> All health teachers should have to take a slightly modified version of this course – which would be more applicable for non-mental health professionals – at the beginning of the school year upon the bill's implementation.

## Policy Analysis

CBT can supply children with daily strategies to live emotionally healthy lives. Once these strategies become habits and skills, students will benefit from the positive effects of the therapy for the rest of their lives.<sup>9</sup> In middle school, bullying is still prevalent while teenage mental health crises are starting to emerge.<sup>10,11</sup> These are both problems students can navigate using CBT, making seventh grade the perfect time to incorporate it into curricula. CBT can help change students' inner dialogues and give them the cognitive tools to not take out their negative emotions on others. This change in behavior can limit bullying, as teaching young students skills like empathy and anger management can decrease behaviors like hitting or teasing.<sup>12</sup> As students age and start to struggle with mental health, it's important they have strong reasoning, problem

solving, and other cognitive skills. CBT will arm students with those skills and enable them to persevere through their struggles.

Additionally, schools should be a place where students can seek help because, at times, their home lives is a cause of their mental health problems.<sup>13</sup> During the pandemic, the CDC reported that a parent or caregiver emotionally abused 55% and physically abused 11% of children.<sup>14</sup> It has also been proven that CBT lowers individuals' tendency to resort to crime, especially violent crime, showing yet another benefit of how skills children learn in school can stick with them for life and help them make positive life decisions.<sup>15</sup>

### Highlights

- Bullying in middle school and mental health issues in high school have proven to be two of the biggest problems for students' well-being.<sup>16,17</sup>
- Cognitive behavioral therapy is a form of talk therapy that has been proven to aid children and adults in everything from expressing emotions healthily to combatting major mental health struggles.<sup>18</sup> CBT aims to provide people with a set of skills that they can use when facing struggles in their daily lives, and there is reason to believe that it could be very successful in lowering levels of everything from bullying to depression and suicide.<sup>19</sup>
- The New York State legislature should implement CBT into schools' seventh grade health curriculum to give all

students these behavioral skills that can last a lifetime.

- The proposed policy would only incur a small financial cost and could have powerful health benefits. It could also be a powerful way to destigmatize therapies for students and parents alike.

### Implementation

School-based CBT programs are not unheard of. In fact, the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) has previously recommended versions of it.<sup>20</sup> The CPSTF was established in 1996 and is made up of independent, nonfederal public health experts who were appointed by the CDC.<sup>21</sup> The CPSTF has recommended universal (provided to all students) school-based CBT programs as a preventative measure for mental health and targeted school-based programs for children with increased risk.<sup>22,23</sup> If the CBT plan that the CPSTF had endorsed was implemented, all health teachers would have to attend their three professional development days at the start of the 2024-2025 school year for which they would be compensated. This would make them certified in the basics of the skills needed for this unit. Usually, students take one semester of health class in middle school, typically in seventh grade. With this program, a semester of health classes is added purely to focus on CBT, so students still have a semester to focus on sexual health and other crucial health topics. The price of this program would be minimal, with the only cost being the overtime for the three professional development days for health teachers and the cost of payment for the individuals

teaching the program. Accounting for the number of teachers in New York State, the number of health teachers per school, the number of health classes taught by non-health teachers, and the number of schools in New York State, there are about 3,018 teachers who teach middle school health classes and would need to go through this program.<sup>24,25,26</sup> Additionally, it would be necessary to pay a professional to teach the CBT program at the 1720 middle schools across New York.<sup>27</sup> Using average salary data in New York State for teachers, the estimated cost of this program is \$3,690,380.<sup>28</sup> In 2016, NY made 545 million dollars on parking tickets, meaning a 0.68% increase in ticket prices could yield an additional 3.69 million dollars needed for this program.<sup>29</sup>

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# Increased Federal Funding Towards Public School English as a Second Language Programs

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*The increasing number of international students studying in the United States each year reveals gaps in linguistic aid, making it vital to allocate resources to secondary language learning.*

## Background

During the 20th century in the US, there were large shifts in public attitudes towards bilingualism and multiculturalism.<sup>1</sup> These shifts led to the assimilation of immigrant students into America by requiring and promoting English-speaking environments.<sup>2</sup> Until the government made strides to sanction bilingual programs, an immense lingual gap existed but was continuously ignored.<sup>2</sup> For non-native speakers, transitioning to English is challenging and often causes students to fall behind academically, therefore increasing the time they remain in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.<sup>3</sup> The establishment of the Bilingual Education Act focused on providing schools with federal grants to help create programs for those with limited English ability and made great strides in fostering the growth of bilingualism.<sup>4</sup> ESL programs are primarily funded by the states and usually have a flat rate.<sup>5</sup> The US immigrant population is reaching new highs, with over 46 million foreign-born people residing in the US.<sup>6</sup> The current ESL program is unable to support the quantity of students. English learners (ELs) are one of the fastest-growing groups within US schools, leading to the need for more support.<sup>5</sup> While Title III funding gradually increased from 2002 to 2011, there has been a flatline rate of \$7.4 million from

2013 to 2019.<sup>4</sup> Despite the funding increase in recent years, support is still too minimal to distribute enough resources to support the influx of non-English speaking students. This financial limitation has left ESL funding in poor condition, even though the EL population has substantially grown.<sup>4</sup> With English being a foundational language, resources need to be provided to students whose first language is not English in order for them to receive the maximum gain from the schooling system.

## Policy Idea

The federal government should require states to use formula calculations that consider the number of ELs per district to create an effective program. Due to the increase in non-English speakers and the variation from district to district, funding needs to follow the immigration trends and be allocated accordingly. Additionally, allocating funding per EL in each district would allow for the resources to be utilized efficiently instead of having extra resources that go untouched. Using formula distribution to decide funding instead of flat rates would allow for redistribution of funding via Title III instead of increasing tax money per district.

## Policy Analysis

The average amount of funding per EL student, as set by Title III's funding levels, is set around \$175.<sup>4</sup> The recent increases in non-English speaking students have stopped these price distribution standards from being met. The implementation of ESL funding should be mandated by each state's government. However, due to the variation in resources within each state, Congress will have to create a policy that sets a price floor for state education funding. Having a baseline price will allow states to either meet the set standard or go beyond and advance the secondary learning resources. Improving secondary language education will allow for a mutualistic benefit between native English speakers and ELs because it will broaden viewpoints within classes and better people. Additionally, there will be increased economic opportunities, fostering more language diversity in pre-professional jobs. Therefore, bilingual people will be able to communicate with more clientele, allowing for a more equitable environment due to language barriers being cut down.

## Highlights

- While the English learner population is expanding within the schooling system, inequities and a lack of

resources have created achievement gaps between proficient English speakers and English learners.<sup>2</sup>

- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decline within the educational system, causing English as a Second Language Learning to grapple with being prioritized during the economic recovery of the schooling institution.<sup>6</sup>
- It is estimated that by 2025, one out of every four children in classrooms around the country will be English learners.<sup>7</sup>
- Through the redistribution of federal funds, EL students can be provided adequate resources to allow them to succeed in the classroom and stay on par with their English-speaking peers.

## Implementation

Funding allocation for English learners is factored into state funding; however, the primary formula used to determine distribution is set at a flat weight for around half of the states.<sup>5</sup> In order to support ELs to the full extent, funding should be distributed based on the number of ELs per district. Since not all schools will have the same number of EL students, it is beneficial to allocate funding resources by EL enrollment to ensure the ESL program can support the students by quantity. By moving away from flat rate funding and gaining more federal funding

for the program, EL learners can be supported early on, ensuring progress and allowing them to graduate from the program and create room for new ELs instead of being forced to continue due to inadequate resources. Additionally, advertising the ESL program and gaining funding from the public via fundraisers can lessen the educational gap. Increased funding will lead to better resources for ELs, allowing them to have a more catered curriculum for their language development. Often, the lack of proper funding leads to the needs of each student not being met. Through a more catered curriculum, students can continue being challenged and presented with content that fits their language development rather than being subjected to generalized content that may not be challenging enough.

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# Equitable Access: The Imperative of Mandating Comprehensive Civic Education in Schools for Voter Education

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*Mandating a comprehensive civic education program in all schools is an essential step toward ensuring that every student has equal and adequate access to voter education.*

## Background

US teen voter turnout percentages reflect insufficient civic education access and voter education. The difference in voting rates between seniors and individuals aged 18 to 25 has consistently stayed above 20% since 1970.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, for example, 68% of seniors voted, whereas 39% of people between 18 and 24 did.<sup>1</sup> This data reveals a continuing disparity in young adult political participation. Some states have passed laws specifically pertaining to civic education, but others have decided to establish general guidelines and give local school districts the authority to design and implement their own civics education curricula and tests.<sup>2</sup> According to data from the NAEP study, 68% of eighth graders said they had taken a course that focused mostly on US history, while 20% said they had taken a course that just covered a portion of the topic. About half of the students reported taking part in a class that was primarily focused on civics education, and the other 32% said they got some exposure to the subject in a class.<sup>3</sup> This lack of civic education exposure may contribute to a lack of civic understanding and engagement among young people. In some areas, efforts to strengthen civic education and increase teen

voter participation have had positive results. For example, voter registration rates among young people have increased dramatically in states that have instituted mandatory voter education courses in schools.<sup>4</sup> According to the Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), there is a positive relationship between having a state-mandated civics exam and both registration and turnout among young people.<sup>5</sup> The findings imply that initiatives mandating voter education courses demonstrate a positive correlation with increased youth voter registration and turnout rates, highlighting the potential impact of structured civic instruction on fostering greater civic involvement among young people.

## Policy Idea

Enforcing universal access to voter education for all students requires the implementation of a comprehensive, required civic education program in all schools. This program advocates that all students, regardless of background or location, should receive instruction about our democratic system. The latter high school classes, around 11th or 12th grade, should be the primary emphasis of this program. It should cover important subjects including voter

registration, civic rights and obligations, and the democratic system. The aim is to create a national curriculum that is standard for all high school students, guaranteeing that these important civic values are understood consistently.

## Policy Analysis

Several studies have found that locations or communities with inadequate civic education opportunities had lower voter registration and turnout rates among young adults. According to the Civics Center's March 2021 Report, legislation, regulations, and programs encouraging young people to complete voter registration forms as soon as they turn 16 can significantly increase youth voting.<sup>6</sup> Registration at the age of 16 also raises awareness among high school students that they can register to vote before turning 18, which is one of the most effective techniques for encouraging young civic involvement.<sup>7</sup> Research suggests that civics education works. Discussing controversial subjects, participating in service learning that includes examination of "root causes," being approached by parties and campaigns, and participating in extracurricular clubs all predict positive civic outcomes

for students.<sup>7</sup> This component emphasizes the necessity for mandated civic education, since existing gaps in political knowledge and involvement must be addressed.

Given these differences in civic learning and participation, it is critical to emphasize the value of required civic education since there is an urgent need to close the current inequalities in political knowledge and participation. White, wealthy children are four to six times more likely than Hispanic or Black students from low-income households to score above the "proficient" level in civics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).<sup>8</sup> These findings show that civic education has the ability to level the playing field, providing marginalized groups a greater say in the democratic process. Existing evidence emphasizes civic education's significant and long-term influence, making it a critical component in sustaining the life of any democracy.<sup>8</sup> Finally, this mandate encourages diversity and enhances our society's democratic fabric, ensuring that every voice is heard and appreciated, regardless of individual backgrounds or circumstances.

### Highlights

- Promote a required civic education curriculum for all high school students, giving priority to important topics like voter registration, the democratic system, and civic rights, in order to guarantee equitable access to political knowledge. The goal of this program is to promote civic principles that are consistent across high schools.

- Closing civic gaps is critical because places without civic education programs frequently have lower voter registration rates. Well-structured civic education efforts consistently correspond with increased political engagement. In the 2020 election, for example, the voter turnout percentage for those with a high school diploma was 55.5%, while the turnout rate for those with a bachelor's degree was 77.9%.<sup>9</sup>
- Longitudinal research over a 20-year span demonstrates the long-term favorable influence of rigorous civic education on democracy.<sup>10</sup> Countries with effective civic programs have higher levels of political awareness, emphasizing the importance of civic education in preserving a dynamic and inclusive democratic system.

### Implementation

A diversified approach is required to implement the proposed policy effectively. The first step is to create a standardized civic education curriculum for high school pupils, with a special emphasis on those in 11th or 12th grade. This curriculum should emphasize essential issues such as how the democratic system works, the complexities of voter registration, and a knowledge of civic rights and obligations. Collaboration with educators and civics education professionals is critical to ensure the curriculum's comprehensiveness and engagement. This phase is critical to giving all high school students a consistent and high-quality civic

education experience regardless of background or geographical location.

Mandatory adoption is a critical phase in the implementation of the proposed policy. It entails actively urging all high schools, regardless of location or student demographics, to make the standardized civic education curriculum a required component of their educational programs. This adoption can be assisted by state or federal regulations, which ensure that every high school student, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic position, obtains an equal and thorough civic education, thereby reducing inequities.

Collaboration within the community is also vital, as it seeks to encourage partnerships between schools and community organizations, aiming to enhance civic education activities. These agreements can give students essential practical experience, arrange for guest lecturers, and provide opportunities for civic participation. Such interactions broaden students' awareness of democratic values and contribute to a more comprehensive civic education experience, ensuring that they are not only informed about democratic processes but also actively engaged in their communities.

Program investment is a vital component of policy implementation. It requires allocating more resources and financing to comprehensive civic education programs that focus on curriculum development as well as teacher training. Schools must have the funds, support, and resources to successfully administer the standardized civic education curriculum in order to fulfill high

standards and give every student a worthwhile educational experience.

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# ENVIRONMENTAL & TECHNOLOGY POLICY

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# Strengthening US National Security Through Improved Global Climate Risk Assessment

By Maoz Bizan, [mb2389@cornell.edu](mailto:mb2389@cornell.edu)

*The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency should establish the Office of Environmental Security, a new division within the US Department of Defense focused on examining climate change-related risks abroad, to inform US national security strategies for future conflicts resulting from the climate crisis and its consequences.*

## Background

As ecological disasters increasingly threaten essential resources, such as clean water and the global food supply, the likelihood of diplomatic crises ranging from economic tensions to outright conventional warfare increases. In 2021, the US Department of Defense (DOD) issued its first Climate Risk Analysis (DCRA), describing the current diplomatic and strategic ramifications of climate change. The 2021 DCRA outlines the DOD's concern regarding the impact of climate change on national security and establishes a framework for integrating climate considerations into the Department's future strategies.<sup>1</sup> For example, the DOD Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid initiative aims to minimize the consequences of climate change-related events in vulnerable regions, focused particularly on humanitarian relief in countries allied with the US.<sup>2</sup> Despite the DOD's clear recognition of the increasing security threat posed by climate change, the Department's plans detailed in the DCRA lack a significant predictive, future-oriented element. With the worsening of environmental crises, events that may lead to conflict become more likely and unpredictable and lack of certainty

about unexpected concerns is bound to pose an increasingly large threat to the United States' national security. This gap in national defense strategy could be addressed by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), which currently serves as the primary DOD entity responsible for the geographical aspects of national security strategy.<sup>3</sup> The NGA has been pivotal in informing relief efforts for domestic and international natural disasters, such as Hurricane Irma, which impacted several Caribbean nations in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Because of its past involvement and analytical expertise, the NGA is well-equipped to expand its assessments relating to climate change.

## Policy Idea

To address the increasing security challenges posed by climate change, the NGA should introduce a new Office of Environmental Security, responsible for analyzing vulnerabilities to environmental concerns worldwide and forecasting consequences of potential climate events. The Office should have the unique ability to use the NGA's existing geospatial information, supplemented by data on regional sources of food, water, and natural resources. Combining this

information with advances in environmental research and existing security intelligence, the Office of Environmental Security could reveal the geographic areas where climate events pose the largest diplomatic risks for the US. The results of these assessments would allow the newly established office to provide the DOD with increasingly valuable intelligence to shape its future defense strategies.<sup>5</sup>

## Policy Analysis

Ecological threats posed by climate change have been proven to cause national security concerns. The 2023 Ecological Threat Report by the Institute for Economics and Peace identifies that water scarcity and environmental hazard exposure can increase the risk of armed conflict by 18% and 21% respectively. The report correlates temperature rises with increased recruitment of children by violent non-state actors, and notes that improved standards of living and higher levels of personal safety provided by armed groups increase citizen participation in civil wars in the face of food insecurity. In the year following two devastating cyclones in Mozambique, deaths associated with armed conflict rose by 174%, and the rise of Boko Haram in western Africa has been linked to a regional drought and its

adverse impact on Lake Chad.<sup>6</sup> Future conflict from ecological threats in diplomatically sensitive areas, such as the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, could pose large challenges to the US's national security.

Predicting vulnerable regions and associated risks to national security requires existing geospatial field data, available from other branches of the NGA, to inform localized ecological predictions. Collaboration with government agencies such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to utilize climate models in tandem with geospatial intelligence will allow for region-specific predictions with minimal additional budgetary requirements. Using machine learning would reduce reliance on field collection of data in diplomatically sensitive jurisdictions, revealing areas of concern while reducing risk and costs associated with collecting detailed field and climate data. Academics have used this technology for risk assessments related to climate change, including prediction of variable crop yields or flood risk.<sup>7&8</sup> The Office of Environmental Security should similarly use machine learning techniques to assess possible effects of climate change on essential sectors in regions of concern, particularly infrastructure and agriculture. By incorporating algorithms such as Neural Networks and Support Vector Machines, the Office of Environmental Security could produce precise and accurate predictions to inform US national security efforts.<sup>9</sup>

### Highlights

- Ecological challenges, amplified by the increasing

severity of the climate crisis, threaten resources globally and increase risks to the US's national security. Current national defense plans include minimal predictive elements for future environmental threats.

- Environmental challenges both cause new international security risks and amplify existing ones, emphasizing the need for proactive measures in US defense strategies surrounding vulnerable regions.
- The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency should create the new Office of Environmental Security to inform Department of Defense strategies with predictions for environmental security hazards.

### Implementation

A new Office of Environmental Security within the US DOD would prove a strong step towards ensuring that the American defense strategy remains resilient and proactive in the face of a changing climate and global security situation. Inauguration of the Office as a division within the NGA would require both the fulfillment of funding requirements through congressional legislation, and administrative structuring by NGA executive leadership. The overlap between the data required and used by the Office and that already in use by existing branches of the NGA and other government agencies suggests a relatively low budgetary requirement to form the Office. Because spending on the NGA and, thus, the Office of Environmental Security, is determined by overall budgeting

towards the National Intelligence Program, the successful creation of this Office would mainly depend on organizational matters within the NGA. Primary budget allocations should be towards analysts and personnel within the Office of Environmental Security, as well as towards fulfilling the logistical requirements of acquiring data from other divisions, collecting new data, and establishing technologies necessary for data analysis. Due to this relatively integrated approach to forming the new Office and its high return on improving national security strategy, congressional and internal executive opinions would likely be favorable.

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# Green Universities: Funding Green Energy Programs, Research, and Initiatives in Higher Education

By William Dignam, [wed45@cornell.edu](mailto:wed45@cornell.edu)

*Colleges have a responsibility not only to educate younger Americans about climate change but also to implement more programs and initiatives for students to get directly involved in fighting climate change. The government should aid universities in achieving this goal through additional funding, tax benefits, and other incentives.*

## Background

With the imminent threat of climate change, only 164 colleges out of the 3982 institutions of higher learning in America use renewable energy to power their campuses.<sup>1,2</sup> This number is not only concerning but also undermines the role universities have in educating the youth about sustainability and climate change. These institutions attract young students from around the world, dedicated to learning, improving the future, and empowering communities on and around campus. College students significantly enrich the local economy, cultural diversity, and overall vitality of the communities in which they choose to study and live.<sup>3</sup> Still, universities can do more to help their communities by providing opportunities for students to engage in eco-friendly programs both on and off campus.

Cornell University, a private university located in Ithaca, New York, has announced a three-step proposal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2035.<sup>4</sup> The university, long known as one of the biggest research universities in America, aspires to first reduce emissions on campus through geothermal and

heat source power, a type of renewable energy especially applicable to the mountainous regions of upstate New York.<sup>4</sup> Cornell's two other action plans require direct community involvement between the university and the rest of the state, providing a way for partnerships and companies to emerge from the research done at Cornell.<sup>4</sup> Overall, Cornell's carbon neutrality plan is not only a great way for Cornell students to get involved in green research, but the plan itself has positive implications for the whole state of New York. Cornell and all other universities have the power to influence audiences from around the world and inspire change. Since Cornell's announcement to go carbon neutral, other major universities have also followed suit. Princeton University plans on achieving carbon neutrality by its 300th anniversary in 2046.<sup>5</sup> Emory University is cutting half of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.<sup>6</sup> Even with the influence universities have, more needs to be done to promote sustainability in higher education.

## Policy Idea

All American universities should receive further funding, tax

benefits, and incentives for promoting green initiatives on campus and in surrounding communities. Universities, through state and federal agreements, play a massive role in the development of both metropolitan and rural areas. With more policies implemented to promote green research and initiatives at universities, areas surrounding campuses can expect further developments in sustainable technology and green infrastructure. Additionally, with the increasing rates at which younger Americans attend college, universities are necessary for shaping future generations, promoting social change, advancing green technology and research, and spreading awareness of climate change.

## Policy Analysis

College campuses are ideal locations for the implementation of green initiatives, given their substantial energy needs to power the various resources needed for students. Colby College in Waterville, Maine is one of the first (of four) universities in America to go completely carbon neutral.<sup>7</sup> Its renewable energy and environmental studies program

provides on-campus internships and opportunities for students to explore how the campus is powered and how its initiatives help Waterville in its sustainability efforts through a state-university agreement. The program's success is evident in its growth, with over 150 students participating. Colby College suggests that younger Americans are indeed looking for more opportunities to get involved in the green space. According to a 2020 Princeton Review survey with over 10,000 students, more than two-thirds of students would factor in schools' environmental commitments when deciding where to attend.<sup>8</sup>

To stay competitive, colleges require cutting-edge technology. By transitioning to green technology, colleges will save money in the long run by avoiding future regulations and mandates for green technology and infrastructure. Additionally, fixed pricing for renewable energy makes it a much safer option for universities than fossil fuels. Through an agreement with Iberdrola Renewables LLC, Ohio State University, a public university in Columbus, Ohio, saved over a million dollars in 2014 alone from wind power.<sup>9</sup> With better policies and funding, colleges would be more willing to invest in the high initial costs of renewables if it means saving more money in the long run. Renewable energy projects also create more jobs, which was true in the case of Ohio State University, which employed over 400 people to create wind turbines.<sup>9</sup>

### Highlights

- Only 164 out of 3982 American colleges currently utilize renewable energy,

hindering their potential to serve as leaders in environmental education and sustainability.<sup>1,2</sup> Colby College in Maine showcases the success of a carbon-neutral initiative, revealing the demand among students for opportunities to engage in environmental programs.<sup>7</sup>

- American universities should receive increased funding, tax benefits, and incentives for promoting green initiatives, fostering sustainable technology, and advancing research. The proposed policy promotes campuses becoming hubs for green energy, leveraging their influence to inspire change, promoting social awareness, and developing sustainable technology.
- Transitioning to green technology not only aligns with the imperative to address climate change but also provides long-term cost savings for universities. By avoiding future regulations and benefiting from fixed pricing, universities stand to save money, attract environmentally conscious students, and contribute to job creation through renewable energy projects, as shown with Ohio State University.<sup>9</sup>

### Implementation

Currently, universities use endowments provided by students and private organizations for projects and developments on and off campuses. Therefore, many universities first need incentives, such as tax cuts and benefits, as a motive to spend endowment money

on green energy. Thankfully, due to the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, more is being done to incentivize both public and private universities to invest in green technology. Before 2022, if a university started a green energy project, the university would receive tax credits for the total income the university made. Nearly all of the income produced by a university is not taxable, making these tax credits poor incentives for a university to start a green energy project. The Inflation Reduction Act now promotes a "direct election" method for tax credits, transferring them into tax refunds and direct refund payments.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, a university can elect to transfer tax credits into cash payments directly if the tax credits were earned through green energy projects. To improve on the act, any green development, ranging from research to new programs at the university, should earn the institution a tax credit. Providing additional benefits, such as a temporary reduction in the university's electricity expenses during the construction of green energy infrastructure, can mitigate the perceived risks that universities might consider when deciding to invest in sustainable practices.

Another solution may be to remove tax credits from the situation altogether and instead opt for direct funding from the government. However, only 3.6% of federal spending in 2018 was used to help universities, and these funds were mostly funneled into student aid, grants, and contracts rather than on-campus developments.<sup>11</sup> This lack of substantial funding directly allocated to universities for green initiatives reflects a missed opportunity to harness the

transformative, green potential of these institutions. Additional funding should be given to institutions that have clear intentions and plans to go carbon neutral by a designated period of time. The sooner the goal, the more funding the institution receives from the government. This ensures the university stays on track to achieving its objectives. More stakeholders should get involved in assisting universities with green projects as well, and this can be achieved with tax benefits provided to the stakeholders.

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# Satisfying Societal and Political Needs in the Remediation of the Dutch Housing Crisis

By Noah Duguma, [ndd32@cornell.edu](mailto:ndd32@cornell.edu)

*The Netherlands is experiencing population growth at breakneck speeds and will be in dire need of new housing in the coming decades. To ameliorate the housing crisis, the Dutch government should dismantle the BBB political blockade by developing high-density settlements along existing train lines.*

## Background

With a density of over 500 people per square kilometer, the Netherlands is one of the most densely inhabited countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> As of 2023, the Netherlands faces a shortfall of 390,000 homes, a number projected to rise to 981,000 by 2030.<sup>2</sup> In spite of such high population density, the Netherlands achieves astonishing agricultural yields. It ranks as the second largest global exporter of agricultural products, trailing only the United States, with an annual export value of €65 billion.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Netherlands holds the distinction of being the largest exporter of meat within the European Union.<sup>4</sup> To achieve such high agricultural outputs, 66 percent of the Netherlands' land is used for agriculture, yet only two percent of the Dutch workforce is employed in the agricultural sector.<sup>5</sup>

Although agriculture has historically been an important sector of the Dutch economy, the sector does not justify the burgeoning population of the small county pushing the Dutch housing sector to the brink of ruin. One major challenge in addressing this housing crisis is the scarcity of suitable land for construction, a consequence of extensive land use for agriculture.

The current state of housing affairs is further complicated by the current precipitous rise of a new Dutch political party, the Boer Burger Beweging (Farmer-Citizen Movement). The BBB is a primarily right-wing, agrarian political party that promotes rural expansion at the expense of high-density housing. Moreover, considering that additional rural expansion exacerbates the Dutch nitrogen crisis, there is all the more reason to expand high-density residential developments.<sup>6</sup> The Dutch housing crisis is a multifaceted issue, intertwined with environmental challenges and land-use patterns that have brought the nation close to its environmental carrying capacity.

## Policy Idea

To successfully address the Dutch housing problem, the Dutch government should strike a balance between competing environmental, political, and societal interests. Firstly, the Dutch government should mandate that all new housing development in the Netherlands should be geared towards a high-density layout that discourages the use of personal automobiles. This approach should be supported by the exclusive use of mixed zoning practices to maintain density. Additionally, much of the new land for construction should be

sourced from repurposing agricultural land situated along existing train lines, reducing the need for extensive infrastructure investments.

To ensure cooperation with Dutch farmers, a map of planned expansion should be released to the broader public by the Dutch government detailing the potential areas of construction. This process should encompass multiple rounds of land acquisition, with willing farmers first selling their land to the Dutch government and a second round of land acquisition through above market-price offers from the Dutch government.

## Policy Analysis

The Netherlands is in a precarious environmental position. With the highest density of livestock in the European Union combined with such a small land area, the problem of nitrogen pollution is ubiquitous within the Netherlands; the country has one of the highest nitrogen concentrations per hectare, at 174 kilograms.<sup>7</sup> The proposed policy reduces the density of livestock within the Netherlands, thereby reducing nitrogen pollution.

The economic context of the Netherlands' agricultural industry should be considered in relation to other sectors. Within recent

decades, the Netherlands has made a complete shift towards a market-based economy, resulting in a sharp decline in agricultural employment. As aforementioned, a mere two percent of the Dutch workforce is engaged in agriculture, contributing to only 1.55 percent of the Dutch GDP as of 2023.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the Dutch government should analyze the costs of maintaining an agricultural sector that is such a miniscule part of the Dutch economy. The vast majority of the Dutch population would extract a much larger benefit from having an ample amount of affordable housing rather than excess stocks of food.

In spite of the immense societal need for housing in the Netherlands, the Dutch government still has to strike a compromise with the BBB. This political party, having gained significant influences by securing many provincial seats, plays a pivotal role in the success of this policy. Implementing a double round of land acquisition would address the BBB's concerns by allowing prior notification, enabling them to contribute their input and formulate alternative solutions.

### Highlights

- The Netherlands is currently experiencing a severe housing crisis that will only get worse with time, projected to increase to a nearly one million housing unit shortfall by 2030.<sup>2</sup>
- There is also a steadily rising prominence of the BBB, a Dutch political party that is against new housing development.
- The Dutch government should strike a compromise between the Netherlands' housing needs and the

demands of the BBB political party.

### Implementation

The first step to ameliorating the Dutch housing crisis is to determine which areas within the Netherlands are “high demand” and “low demand.” The majority of new housing development within the past two decades in the Netherlands has been within an area called the “Randstad” (a conurbation of the four Dutch provinces of North Holland, South Holland, Utrecht, and Flevoland). The Randstad contains the largest port in Europe (Rotterdam) as well as the main airport of the Netherlands. The Randstad is the economic heart of the Netherlands and creates the largest number of jobs. Therefore, it is imperative that the approach within this policy proposal centers heavily on the four provinces that comprise the Randstad. Outside of the Randstad, much of the new housing development should occur around the areas of the student cities of Nijmegen, Groningen, Maastricht, Eindhoven, Enschede, and Tilburg. Although these cities are not in the Randstad, they are large centers of congregation for domestic and international students. As a result, these cities have comparatively large housing strains to cities in the Randstad.

With the two areas of development being the Randstad and several university cities outside the Randstad, the Dutch planning authority must do extensive research on who owns the land along the country's existing train lines. The reason why the planning authority must develop along train lines is that although the Netherlands is quite well-

connected, it is important not to add additional expenses to this housing initiative by constructing new train lines to connect new centers of habitation to existing cities. Adding this stipulation will inadvertently keep new sites of habitation well connected to the rest of the country.

When sites of building are identified, the Dutch planning authority must approach the farmers and offer above-market value to buy their land. It must be emphasized that farmers should not be forced to sell their land, rather this selling initiative will be a voluntary process selected farmers can choose. Considering the large power the BBB wields in the Dutch political ecosystem due to its winning of a majority of the provincial elections, even a voluntary land-buying program is bound to cause uproar within the BBB. The Dutch government should ease the political ire by compensating farmers fairly and providing plans for farmers to transition into civilian life. After enough farmland has been accumulated, the Dutch government should sell the land to property developers at a low price. Even though the Dutch government is losing money in acquiring land, the economic and societal repercussions of such a grave housing shortfall are far worse.

It should be required that property developers build in a high-density manner, prioritizing non-auto forms of transportation, essentially continuing the current mode of Dutch planning. With these steps, the wants of the BBB party can be resolved and the severe duress that the Dutch housing ecosystem is currently facing will dissipate.

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# Advancing Farms for the Future

By Henry Han, [hyh8@cornell.edu](mailto:hyh8@cornell.edu)

*In the face of climate change and its detrimental impacts on food, investing in farming technology protects the US agricultural industry and the greater food supply chain.*

## Background

Agriculture is one of the most vulnerable sectors of the US macroeconomy due to its reliance on land and water. The annual output of American farms is heavily dependent on precipitation, temperature, and sunlight all of which can dramatically change with climate change.<sup>1</sup> Air pollution can interfere with photosynthesis, and wildfires can burn farmlands – all threats to farmers’ livelihoods and the public they feed.<sup>1</sup> For example, climate change could lead corn yields to fall 24 percent in seven years.<sup>2</sup> A severe decline in crop yields has dangerous national implications that demand solutions.

Farmers and ranchers across the US play a pivotal role in combating climate change and protecting the food supply chain. Precision agriculture, which employs environmentally friendly technologies like global positioning systems (GPS) tracking and variable-rate input application technologies (VRT) for accurate material application, can significantly boost farm efficiency.<sup>3</sup> GPS tracking is useful for mapping farmlands, which can guide farmers on the best place to place crops while tracking those crops. Similarly, VRT automates precise distribution of seeds, fertilizers, and other products on farmlands. In short, this technology is essential. However, precision agriculture requires training to operate and is relatively expensive for small

farmers who may opt for short-term gains over long-term capital. Small farmers, who make up 85 percent of American farms, seldom own precision agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the cost of installing the satellite system for precision agriculture as of May 2022 is \$55,000 and an additional \$6,000 every month.<sup>4</sup> Satellite for precision agriculture is virtually unaffordable considering the median annual income for farm households is slightly over \$95,700.<sup>5</sup>

## Policy Idea

Congress should enact a federal precision agriculture loan program and educational grant program for small farmers to cut down the financial and educational barriers to utilize precision agriculture with more affordable technologies, higher education research, and outreach investments. Congress and the president should negotiate the exact dollar amount for each program with a given budget constraint while the US Department of Agriculture should determine the allocation of grants based on the need and merit of their applications. Ideally, small farmers and rural community colleges that show promising proposals should receive the money they require.

States should also fund similar programs tailored to their agricultural needs. Drier states like Nevada and Alaska may not need precision agriculture, whereas Iowa and South Dakota, where farms

contribute 7.49 percent and 11.09 percent to the state’s GDP, respectively, may need more state-focused investment.<sup>6</sup>

## Policy Analysis

Precision agriculture, a practice in use since the 1980s, has proven to increase crop yield while also being environmentally friendly and cost-effective. Based on 2010 surveys, corn production with GPS soil mapping alone saves \$13.45 per acre.<sup>7</sup> Precision agriculture simultaneously reduces pesticide and water waste, which is environmentally beneficial and leads to greater crop yield as data has shown over the past two decades.<sup>8</sup>

This policy lowers the barriers to entry in precision agriculture for small farmers, allowing them to learn about technology that tackles climate change and augments crop yields. With rural and farm-based communities remaining closing to their homes for higher education and over half of those who attend a rural community college being “very dependent” on financial aid, these educational grants aid institutions in improving precision agricultural methods while also recruiting and retaining future precision agriculture users.<sup>9</sup> Education and training is complementary to precision agriculture, making it essential to attend some program to learn how



to operate this cost-effective technology.<sup>10</sup>

The 118th Congress has introduced two pieces of legislation that address the cost and education of precision agriculture nationally: H.R.1459 (PRECISE Act) and H.R.3425 (Community College Agriculture Advancement Act). Both bills have bipartisan support in the House and Senate from various geographic areas. The Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance, American Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Farm Bureau, and John Deere all support the PRECISE Act.<sup>11</sup> Various college and university associations endorse the CCAA Act.<sup>12</sup>

### Highlights

- Precision agriculture is both cost-effective and environmentally friendly to confront the growing climate crisis that threatens the food supply chain.
- There are a wide range of precision agriculture technologies, but the objective of such technologies, such as GPS tracking and VRT, is to provide accurate tracking, dispersion, and overall maintenance of farmlands so that resources are applied accurately and precisely, saving resources in the process.
- With precision agriculture being very costly for small farmers, it is imperative that they receive the necessary resources to continue to profit and adapt to changing environmental conditions.
- The federal and state governments should create technological loan and

educational grant programs to ease the financial burden and provide the complementary education and training necessary to operate precision agriculture.

- The proposed policy will not only benefit smaller farmers but also have larger implications, as it will address the climate crisis and maintain a healthy food supply chain for everyday consumers in the US.

### Implementation

The Farm Bill is set to be reauthorized this congressional session. With the government shutdown deadline approaching and political infighting in the House of Representatives, it may be difficult to get precision agricultural provisions into the bill. However, harnessing this bipartisan coalition through meetings and hearings to gain leadership support in Committee and from both parties can lead to passing a precision agriculture-related bill in the future.

Co-sponsors of the bills should coordinate with supporting organizations, such as farming associations, to use their social media platforms, town halls, farm festivals, relational organizing, etc. to get small farmers to contact their elected officials to co-sponsor and support this proposal come the reauthorization vote or any future votes. Meeting with elected officials face to face can also push reluctant elected officials to sponsor the bills.

A split Congress and political polarization could ultimately lead negotiations to fall through. Big Agriculture may oppose legislation prioritizing small farmers and utilize its lobbying

power to convince Congress to include larger farms. Bills introduced in Congress currently do not prioritize smaller farmers, which could be seen as a handout to agribusinesses and lose the support of progressive elected officials who believe this technology could replace farmworkers or officials who do not represent agricultural areas. A compromise could potentially be reached: instead of focusing on smaller farmers, Congress could prioritize smaller farmers while also expanding access to all farms.

Funding for these programs ultimately comes down to Congress and the president. But if both branches of government wish to provide funding without taking out from the existing budget, tax credits or other climate-based taxes can lower cost or increase funding, respectively.

Farm-dense states, which likely have strong support from elected state officials, can also implement a program similar to that of those outlined in the PRECISE Act and CCAA Act.

In the end, this policy aims to have programs at the federal and state level, wherein precision is more affordable and is thus more widely used amongst small farmers. If successfully implemented, farms will see greater yields and a greater supply of food and profits for everyone.

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# Empowering Regenerative Agriculture: Federal Support for the Farms of the Future

By Maitri Kovuru, [mk2469@cornell.edu](mailto:mk2469@cornell.edu)

*To address conventional farming's environmental detriment, the federal government should establish a tiered program incentivizing and facilitating a shift to a regenerative agricultural system using similar infrastructure to that of the USDA's organic transition initiatives.*

## Background

Farming, which occupies 38% of the earth's land, stands on the brink of a significant transformation seven decades after the Green Revolution.<sup>1</sup> This earlier revolution boosted food production with genetically modified seeds, but its conventional farming methods have taken a toll on the environment, causing increased greenhouse gas emissions, soil erosion, water pollution, and human health issues.<sup>2</sup> According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, agriculture accounted for 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in 2021.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations warns that this number is set to increase if widespread agricultural practices do not change rapidly.<sup>4</sup> In fact, sustainable agriculture must constitute 40% of global farmland to significantly slow climate change.<sup>5</sup> Regenerative agriculture, a climate-resilient farming method growing in popularity due to its environmental benefits, consists of three principal objectives: the reduction of reliance on synthetic inputs, the use of no-till patterns that bolster carbon sequestration, and the improvement of soil health.<sup>6</sup> Private sector firms have realized that they must source ingredients from sustainable food systems to reach net zero commitments. As such, PepsiCo presented plans to

increase the usage of regenerative cropland at the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference.<sup>7</sup> However, these pledges fail to provide sufficient incentives for farmers to shift to an entirely new farming system. A combination of private sector support and government infrastructure is more effective. On the basis of the 1933 Farm Bill, the government currently subsidizes conventional farming of commodity crops like corn, significantly contributing to deforestation and soil depletion.<sup>8</sup> However, since the Depression Era context of the Farm Bill has changed, modern legislation should be restructured to reflect contemporary climate concerns while still incentivizing domestic agriculture. To improve the outlook of agriculture, the US should promote regenerative farming practices, which strive to improve ecosystem health and mitigate climate change.<sup>9</sup>

## Policy Idea

The federal government should facilitate the transition of the agricultural system from few, large-scale conventional farms to multiple, smaller regenerative farms through subsidization. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA), responsible for organic certifications, should additionally

certify farms committed to regenerative practices at one of three tiers. Certification at Tier 1, which requires a reduction of synthetic inputs and utilization of techniques like crop rotation and cover crops, and Tier 2, which is the adoption of no-till methods for carbon sequestration, indicate progress in the transition to regenerative practices. Compliance through three tiers, the final being the improvement of soil health, grants farms legal approval to sell produce with the regenerative label. Ten years should suffice for certification, dedicating two years to implement Tier 1, two years to implement Tier 2, and up to six years to allow for soil regeneration, effectively satisfying Tier 3 and certifying farms to publicly sell produce labeled as regenerative.

## Policy Analysis

Through its use of natural pest control strategies like crop rotation and biodiversity, regenerative farming experiences ten times less abundance in pests than chemically treated fields.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, regenerative farms saw 78% higher profits than conventional corn farms, suggesting economic benefits for farmers who switch to regenerative practices.<sup>10</sup> Some states have already established programs encouraging

isolated objectives of regenerative farming, including soil health improvement. The NOFA-NY Soil Health Program, affiliated with the National Healthy Soils Policy Network, offers workshops and resources to farmers in New York, focusing on enhancing soil health, advocating for land stewardship, clean waterways, and carbon sequestration.<sup>11</sup> NOFA-NY's advocacy efforts have succeeded in increasing funding by \$15.75 million for a bill supporting state-level programs providing encouragement and resources to farmers to improve soil health.<sup>11</sup> Another successful program is the USDA's federal Organic Transition Initiative, which provides farmers with technical and economic assistance throughout the three-year transition period preceding organic certification, during which cropland must be free from synthetic inputs. Of the \$300 million invested in the initiative, the USDA will dedicate \$5 million to securing partnerships with technical experts in organics who will cultivate regional support networks to provide farmers with experiential training.<sup>12</sup> The plethora of organic transition resources serves as evidence that providing infrastructure for the regenerative transition is not only feasible but also a compelling future replacement for organic-centric programs, as regenerative agriculture provides benefits beyond those of organic agriculture.

### Highlights

- Conventional agriculture contributes significantly to deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, degradation of aquatic and terrestrial habitats, and human health detriments.

- As private companies are committing to net zero, they are increasing their use of regenerative agricultural land. Still, for the most effective incentivization of the switch to regenerative practices, the government should take action by redirecting commodity crop subsidies to regenerative practices.
- Regenerative agriculture not only has ecological benefits but has also been shown to produce higher profits for farmers and provide more stability through uncertain climate conditions such as droughts.<sup>9,10</sup>
- Acknowledging the successful implementation of programs providing resources for farmers to instate organic growing practices, creating local, regenerative agriculture systems is feasible. It has a higher return on investment, as these systems are more drought-resilient and promote healthier soils.<sup>10</sup>

### Implementation

The shift to regenerative farming requires government funding to subsidize the use of organic inputs and regenerative methods through direct payments to farmers and financial support to farmers during the transition in which infrastructure for new farming techniques is under development. Subsidies currently directed toward commodity crops detrimental to land and water systems should be redirected toward organic seeds, interim paychecks for farmers who commit to transitioning, and direct payments

for transitioned farmers yielding regenerative produce.<sup>8</sup> Subsidies and farm programs, totaling a value of \$28.5 billion in 2021, generally source funding from the USDA's budget, which primarily functions on government tax collection and borrowing.<sup>13</sup> Redirecting these funds would cover costs of a regenerative initiative and disincentivize commodity crop production.

Stakeholders of this plan span farmers, agricultural input companies, and surrounding communities. Farmers who previously grew commodity crops may feel negative impacts from the loss of commodity-crop subsidies. However, just as organic farmers once transitioned to conventional methods in the face of subsidization, conventional farmers can transition to regenerative methods to qualify for regenerative subsidies. Additionally, government investment in small-scale farm systems will generate more job opportunities for local farmers, allowing them to compete with large, industrialized farms. The need for further human labor to account for the lack of chemical inputs will also create more jobs.<sup>14</sup> Agricultural input companies may need to pivot from synthetic goods to organic fertilizer and seed product lines. These private firms must adapt to maintain their market share in the agriculture industry as it progresses towards sustainable practices and local sourcing. This repositioning in the industry also benefits surrounding communities, as regenerative practices improve air and water quality in the area, and the system of local farms may provide food-insecure communities with improved accessibility to employment and fresh food.<sup>9,6</sup> In

fact, The Nature Conservancy has partnered with the USDA and other organizations to expand regenerative farmland, as research shows that this expansion could curb greenhouse gas emissions by 25 million tons and generate 4.44 billion cubic meters of usable water in agricultural soil by 2025.<sup>15</sup> This policy would receive support from the National Healthy Soils Policy Network and the National Resource Defense Council, which has advocated for and produced research on the future of regenerative agriculture policy in the US.

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# The Biggest Privacy Threats to Americans Are in Their Pockets and Homes

By Krislyn Michel, [ksm239@cornell.edu](mailto:ksm239@cornell.edu)

*Tech firms infringe on Americans' personal data rights every single day. It is necessary to have a federal policy that calls for data transparency from companies and prevents nonconsensual data storage and commodification.*

## Background

Values like liberty, autonomy, and citizen privacy are ingrained within the United States' foundational documents. Advertisement technology companies, blockchain smart-contract oracles, biometric health services, and social media giants are creating their own rules in the data world.<sup>1</sup> As a result, there is an overindulgence of freedom by technological companies that have infringed on user confidentiality by internally or externally storing consumer data to create advertisement profiles or selling it to third parties. This practice undermines America's democracy. Nonconsensual data sharing is a threat not only to citizen privacy but also to national security. University of Virginia's Professor Daniella Citron states information at risk of leaks includes Americans' bodies, health information, sexual orientation, sexual partners, closest relationships, and innermost thoughts.<sup>2</sup> As a legal, civil, and human right, the sensitive information of citizens should be protected.<sup>2</sup>

Unregulated social media and internet surveillance allow individual hackers, criminal organizations, and foreign nations to have access to Americans' most sensitive information. Open access to personal information leaves

Americans' vulnerable to data leaks, ransomware, cyber extortion and more. Without oversight, entities that manage huge quantities of personal data can continue to have a massive monopoly on electioneering.<sup>3</sup> The adverse effects of digital monopolies can appear as a specific presidential candidate receiving more screen time on social media over others, leading to an unequal influence on American politics. Effects of an unregulated internet can manifest in a psychological way as well. Vulnerable groups like the youth are currently unprotected from the targeted advertisements, posts, and images appearing on their internet feed due to undermanaged internet surveillance. There is a link between digital media usage and worsened mental health: "A 2019 study of 6,500+ American adolescents found that those who spend more than 3 hours daily on social media were at heightened risk for mental health problems."<sup>4</sup> However, data privacy affects every single person on the internet. A policy that adds restrictions to the data sphere can benefit everyone. The government should respond with active data reform to protect America's fundamental values and prevent the downfall of the US's democratic state.

## Policy Idea

Congress should pass a federal law providing a federal definition for personal data to protect the minds, personal finances, wealth, and political lives of Americans.<sup>1</sup> Citizens should be notified of if and how companies are storing or selling their sensitive information.<sup>5</sup> This lack of knowledge can be resolved through a "national Do Not Track system" that permits consumers to prevent – or at any point opt out of – third-parties from tracking their internet activity and subsequently targeting advertisements.<sup>6,7</sup> Even if users haven't opted in, consumers should have the right to review free, up-to-date, comprehensible personal information that a company has about them. This review should also grant users: details about the parties involved in the migration of sensitive data and the intentions of this interaction, definitive language on whether the data has led to profile generation, the ability to challenge inaccuracies in these findings or inquire about them. Violations of the policy should be handled by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).<sup>8</sup>

## Policy Analysis

This policy will be effective since it is inspired by House Representative Delbene's Information Transparency &

Personal Data Control Act which defines personal information to eliminate the possibility for companies to find loopholes.<sup>6</sup> Personal data is sensitive intelligence that reveals consumer's information such as facial and audio data, financial information, social security numbers, log in information, and content of communications.<sup>5</sup> Due to the world's ever-changing technological landscape, the scope of this definition may be subject to change. But non-consensual data sharing presents a major threat to our democratic functions. For example, facial data could be used to create deepfakes – audio or video mimicry – in a fake video of a presidential candidate dispersed across the internet, causing the nation's political climate to go off-kilter (Powell and Dent, 2023).<sup>2</sup> This policy's definition depends on the FTC's recent pledge to counter the misuse, dissemination, and exploitation of personal data as seen in its call for enforcement against photo app maker Everalbum and Facebook for its biometric data breaches.<sup>9</sup> These enforcement measures will be mainly supported by Congressional budgetary support of the FTC; \$494.26 Million is available to the FTC in the 2023 fiscal year.<sup>10</sup> Additional assets can derive from the fines of violating entities.

The policy is also effective at punishing companies for the improper use of biometrics as seen in its similarities to the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA).<sup>6</sup> This legislation resulted in major settlements including Google paying \$100 million, TikTok paying \$92 million, and Snapchat paying \$35 million. In 2021, Facebook agreed to a settlement of \$650

million because the entity nonconsensually stored user faceprints. However, this policy's definition fills in gaps of previous privacy laws and would set a new legal precedent for the protection of voice recognition technology previously neglected by BIPA. These specific matters demonstrate that courts will rule in favor of protecting consumers when data privacy and antitrust laws oversee the regulation of biometric data and communications data. The implementation of legislation that simply defines personal data and prevents companies from selling and storing sensitive information protects internet users in the long run.

### Highlights

- In the current state of the world, consumers' personal information includes but is not limited to: health status, finances, relationships and group affiliations, security authentication, communications, internet activity, biometric data, and data belonging to or surrounding individuals under 16 years old.<sup>6</sup>
- Users' sensitive information is currently under-protected in the tech realm. Companies do not have to disclose details gathered from data tracking and collection on their users in their generated user profiles. Entities are selling sensitive data to third parties, which is a national privacy issue.
- To combat this data privacy issue, Congress should implement a federal definition for consumer data and regulation delineating

how personal user information can be utilized by companies.

- The proposed policy calls for transparency from companies in the collection of sensitive data, limits the sale and transfer of user data across multiple parties to strengthen national and personal data security, as well as implements fines for violating companies.

### Implementation

Spanning 15 years, the implementation of the proposed policy should include four phases. The first phase should be the campaigning stage to persuade Americans about the value of data protection. This stage will naturally occur through social media and doorknocking. It may last anywhere from one to three years. However, due to the proposed policy's dependency on an online trajectory to promote the bill, it would face interference and backlash from major internet stakeholders. The business models of major technological companies such as Amazon, Meta, TikTok, and X—formerly known as Twitter—heavily depend on consumer data. Increased regulation on consumer information would threaten their profits and platform functionality. Data reform would mean large economic shifts toward tech companies' respective interfaces that are currently reliant on unprotected consumer data if they plan on avoiding violation fines. Once most Americans are aware of the threats of unregulated data usage, a bill can be drafted and debated within the Congressional House Committee on Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and Commerce,

which was recently formed due to Americans' desire for increased data protection.<sup>11</sup> The authors of this bill will most likely be stakeholders who have a history in data privacy legislation and antitrust work within the technological matrix. There are two proposed candidates within the House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively, who can undertake a role in the bill's legislative process. House Representative Suzan DelBene is a proposed candidate for her authorship of the Information Transparency & Personal Data Control Act. And Senator Ron Wyden due to his decades-long involvement in federal and state data surveillance.<sup>10,11</sup> Using constituent feedback, policymakers can amend the bill to regulate the constantly evolving data sphere through changes in the definition of consumer data and new technology involved in that sphere. The end of this stage would be marked by the President enacting the bill. The third stage provides the groundwork for the bill's implementation, such as the FTC and adjacent federal tech agencies deploying an information data privacy taskforce that would analyze the current market for violations and new developments in the data world. The fourth and final phase is the regulatory component of the legislation, where the FTC would legally pursue infringing entities. It is imperative to set forth a legal precedence on consumer data protection, while the data industry is in its infancy. Establishing personal data regulation will prevent millions of Americans from having to face the negative effects

of data manipulation, thus preserving the nation's democracy.

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# Road Usage Charges: A Necessity in Today's Era of Congestion and Pollution

By Jack Turner, [jt797@cornell.edu](mailto:jt797@cornell.edu)

*Traffic congestion and air pollution have been a nagging problem affecting millions of urban city dwellers, suburbanites, and rural residents alike. Road Usage Charges have immense power to internalize the externalities that driving creates, resulting in a more resilient and safer environment.*

## Background

America is in the midst of a historic congestion crisis: the 2022 INRIX Report on Global Congestion reported that in the US alone, an average person spent 51 hours annually sitting in traffic, spending an extra \$546 in fuel costs.<sup>1</sup> Traffic collisions, already endemic in the US, increased even more by four percent in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Among all cities across the world, major US cities like Chicago, Boston, and Miami saw well over 50% increases in hours spent in congestion between 2021 and 2022. Chicago even ranked second globally, with individuals losing 155 hours annually due to congestion.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics implicate far more than the economic and physical well-being of individuals. Congestion is an environmental catastrophe, exacerbating carcinogenic air pollution and hampering the efficiency of critical public bus networks relied upon by millions for mobility and environmental sustainability. As a whole, the transportation sector accounts for 27% of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Among the emissions that come from transport, the majority of hazardous emissions stem from heavy freight vehicles, despite those vehicles constituting a small proportion of the total vehicles on the road.<sup>2</sup>

## Policy Idea

Local public-private partnerships in the top 50 Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the US should implement GPS-based Road Usage Charges (RUCs) that toll drivers based on miles driven within certain zones set by the city according to real-time congestion data. The money these systems raise for municipalities, in turn, should be invested to improve the public transportation systems that provide alternative transport options to driving. While RUCs are not a novel concept, their relevance to US traffic management is now more important than ever. Congestion Pricing, like the Manhattan scheme slated for 2024, is an excellent model but has some limitations that should be resolved and considered when applied to the national scale.<sup>3</sup>

## Policy Analysis

RUCs need to be assessed from two critical objectives: reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and curbing greenhouse gas emissions from the automobile sector. RUCs implemented in cities around the globe have shown this potential; Stockholm's congestion charging scheme recuperated the investment in social benefits within 4.5 years of policy implementation.<sup>4</sup>

The implementation of a nationwide RUC scheme stands to benefit lower-income inner-city

residents from a horizontal equity perspective.<sup>5</sup> Horizontal equity refers to the equal treatment of people within income groups—for example two people who earn \$50,000 per year pay the same in taxes; unlike tolling specific roads, tolling every vehicle within a defined zone eliminates the possibility of diversion routes for all drivers. Consequently, trucks opting for less efficient routes can no longer do so, leading to lower emissions for vehicles entering congested areas.<sup>6</sup> Research published by Japanese researchers in the *Regional Science and Urban Economics* Journal suggests that cordon-based RUCs, similar to those in the UK, significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>7</sup> Brazilian researchers investigating congestion tolling in Sao Paulo found that “the optimal toll and the toll on congestion delay decrease emissions by a dramatic 71% and 53%, respectively.”<sup>8</sup> While tolls in the US will vary by city and by the degree of congestion within the cordon zone, they have the potential to significantly reduce environmental harm.

## Highlights

- Road Usage Charges have seen historical success when implemented independent of time and location. This success includes a reduction

in both greenhouse gas emissions and in traffic congestion.<sup>4</sup>

- Road Usage Charges have seen success on a global scale illustrating the power for the scheme to be broadly successful in different markets regardless of underlying demographics.<sup>4</sup>
- Lower-income people living within congested urban city centers will see dramatic improvements to their quality of life through the reduction of air pollution and a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

### Implementation

The implementation of a nationwide RUC will benefit from the existing strong foundation that exists for tolling congestion in the US. Electronic tolling has been used exclusively on toll roads for some time in the US and has seen a rapid increase in usage since its introduction in 1991.<sup>9</sup>

Research by Cornell Professor Rick Geddes and colleagues has asserted that all roads should be variably priced depending on the time of day and traffic conditions, and drivers would pay a monthly credit card bill for their driving.<sup>10</sup>

The implementation of RUCs aligns with the preferences of economists and transportation planners, with congestion pricing receiving substantial popular support where executed. Interestingly, public support for congestion pricing in Gothenburg, Sweden, rose from 30% pre-implementation to 55% and higher after implementation.<sup>6</sup>

RUCs face political headwinds given the financial

burden they would place on those who drive extensively. Long-term, though, reduction in traffic congestion through the achievement of free-flowing, accurately priced traffic functions similar to cap-and-trade systems where those who value driving the most use the roads. Rick Geddes also notes that while the vertical equity implications—the assessment that lower-income people might spend more of their income on RUCs in some instances than higher income individuals—are ambiguous. Smart planning and efficient use of the funds to improve public transportation can alleviate those concerns<sup>3</sup>. Congress may wait a couple of years to address infrastructure policy given pressing geopolitical concerns, divided opinions over fiscal management, and a recent flurry of infrastructure spending. Still, if Democrats were to regain a trifecta after the 2024 elections, RUCs stand to create major environmental and economic benefits for major municipalities in which many sitting Democrats represent.

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# FOREIGN POLICY

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# Outlawing Child Marriage Would Help Combat the Domestic Violence Crisis within Ethiopia

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*The banning of child marriage can decrease domestic violence. By ensuring that child marriage is legally banned and institutionally criminalized, the rates at which violence is seen within Ethiopian households would fittingly decrease.*

## Background

Domestic violence is a severe issue that has been heavily tied to the mistreatment of individuals, especially women, within the country of Ethiopia – with 71 percent of women losing their life due to aggressive misconduct by their intimate partner.<sup>1</sup> This physical, emotional, and psychological mistreatment of women not only raises moral concerns but also is explicitly classified as a human rights violation. According to the *American Civil Liberties Union* and the *World Health Organization*, the assertion of violence upon women – especially from a partner – serves as a major public health and social liberty crisis that must be directly resolved.<sup>2,3</sup> Among other factors that result in violence within relationships, coerced childhood marriage is often identified as a leading cause. According to *UNICEF*, young girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to be subjected to violence by a partner.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the organization *Girls Not Brides* highlights that, globally, girls that wed before the age of 15 are 50 percent more likely to experience sexual or physical violence from a partner compared to girls who marry after the age of 18.<sup>5</sup>

A large factor that accounts for child marriage

within Ethiopia is the nation's cultural and religious customs that obligate many young girls into early wedlock. Different cultural enclave groups practice early marriage in order to fulfill religious traditions and gain marital advantages.<sup>5</sup> A journal focused on Ethiopia's customary marital laws exhibits that legal codes set within the country recognize a legitimate marriage as one contracted by a man of at least 18 years of age and a woman who has attained an age of 15 years.<sup>6</sup> Although recent laws have been passed to establish marital egalitarianism within the country, like the 1993 Ethiopian Women's Policy, the average age of marriage persists to be approximately 16.5 years.<sup>1,7</sup>

## Policy Idea

The Ethiopian government should pass strict federal regulation that penalizes and criminalizes the practice of child marriage. This idea could be implemented by creating strict federal legislation that bans child marriage within Ethiopia and sternly raises the legal age of marriage for women to 18 years. Penalties for breaching this law should include heavy tax fines and prison sentences imposed upon

parental and outside parties working to arrange early child marriages.

## Policy Analysis

*Would banning child marriage be an effective and efficient way of reducing domestic violence?*

Countries like Norway have enacted Marriage Acts that strictly ensure that the minimum age of marriage between both men and women is 18.<sup>8</sup> The Norwegian government has set a three-year imprisonment penalty for citizens who coerce a Norwegian minor into marriage within both the country and foreign territories.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, Norway has one of the lowest domestic violence rates amongst women – accumulating a comparatively small margin of 27 percent.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this policy's establishment, migration within the country had caused child marriage to quickly rise, with 63 children – 83 percent of whom were young girls – being forced into marriage between the years of 2005 and 2006.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to determine the time it would take to establish such parameters in a nation like Ethiopia, as it possesses a different cultural, financial, and geographic demography. However, a miniscule amount of fees would be needed to implement this

policy, as most financial constraints would be targeted towards regulating the country's correctional system for those who violate the child marriage law. Likewise, the fines used to combat these practices could be used to support projects that work to further execute this bill. Limitations to this policy proposal could include the act of marrying off adolescent girls without governmental knowledge. Although such actions do pose as a concern to both the maintenance of legal conduct and the safety of women, imposing a criminal penalty or heavy financial fee against those illegally conducting child marriage practices would reduce the likelihood of this problem occurring.

### Highlights

- Domestic violence within Sub-Saharan African countries, specifically in the region of Ethiopia, continues to be a growing epidemic, especially endangering women who wed before turning the age of 18.<sup>4</sup>
- Despite existing laws in Ethiopia banning child marriage, the marital age among women continues to be approximately 16.5 years.<sup>1</sup> Additional legislation should be established to regulate and disincentivize the cultural practices of child marriage within the nation.
- By adding strict punitive regulations like imprisonment and financial penalties against parental and outside parties orchestrating child

marriages, Ethiopia's legislators could follow international models to help regulate its rates of domestic violence that stem from unlawful early childhood marriage.

- This policy is feasible, as it is an extension of existing legislation within Ethiopia and could allocate the funding acquired from the financial retribution imposed upon those who facilitate unlawful child marriages to help monitor the legislation and expand correctional facilities and measures.

### Implementation

This policy should be introduced at the federal level, with community groups like the *Tigray Bureau of Women's Affairs* and the *Ethiopia Federal Ministry of Women, Children and Youth* leading in the policy's efforts to strictly establish laws that prevent early child marriage and domestic violence.<sup>13,14</sup> Likewise, collaborating with organizations like *UNICEF*, *VOW for Girls*, and *Equality Now* that reach over a million women and girls can help work towards creating the federal development of marital laws and eradicating child marriage.<sup>15</sup>

Similar to the United States, Ethiopia follows a bicameral legislature consisting of The House of People's Representatives, which has about 547 seats, and the House of Federation, consisting of about 108 seats.<sup>16</sup> Due to the country's variance in time taken to pass legislation, a firm timeline in regard to the establishment of this law cannot be made. However, following the country's initial

commitment to eradicate child marriage and preserve female bodily autonomy at the Girl Summit in London in 2014, it can be inferred that the timeline for the implementation of this policy would not surpass its preceding legislation.<sup>17</sup>

The success of this policy could be monitored by assessing the decrease in the rate of child marriage by half of its current rate within Ethiopia. As of 2022, 18.6 million girls were married before turning the age of 18, with regions like Somali, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNP) experiencing a 119 percent increase in child marriage between January and April 2021 and the same period in 2022.<sup>18,19,20</sup>

The resistance that this policy may receive would primarily stem from cultural groups in Ethiopia that view early marriage as an economic, religious, and cultural practice that defines many of their persistent traditions.<sup>21</sup> Many of these individuals commemorate early marriage practices to accumulate familial and community wealth. Opposedly, however, not only would decreasing the rates of child marriages in Ethiopia work towards eliminating domestic abuse within the nation, but it could also produce positive externalities like an economic boom resulting from more individuals entering the workforce. A 2017 study by the *World Bank* estimated that ending early child marriage in Ethiopia could generate a 9.3 percent rise in earnings for women who married early and up to \$1.5 billion in additional earnings and productivity for the whole country.<sup>22</sup>

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# Combatting Privatization of Jamaican Beaches by Amending Colonial Policies and Structural Adjustments

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*Jamaica, a sovereign commonwealth island, operates under existing colonial policies, denying citizens rights to public beaches. Accessible public beaches are endangered by legislative voids, privatization, and environmental degradation. Amending the Jamaican constitution will expand access to public beaches.*

## Background

Jamaica, the Caribbean island notable for its marvelous landscape, rich culture, and renowned beaches, faces an extreme privatization trend by corporate commercial developers. The tourism industry's increasing establishment of resorts, hotels, and excursion sites on historically public beaches is ascribable to the industrial development initiatives prompted by policy changes throughout the 1940s to 80s.<sup>1</sup> Legislation was ratified during this period based on the economic theories of Raul Prebisch – which called for the stimulation of the economy by developing foreign industries – and Arthur Lewis – which called for the emergence of modern capitalist industries in developing countries to reduce unemployment. These economics of structural adjustment operate primarily through invitational development. Invitational development promotes international capital inflows to the nation by providing economic incentives such as tax breaks, state promotion, and market protection to foreign business investors. The expansion of tourist businesses in Jamaica dramatically increased the privatization of publicly owned beaches. One prevailing colonial

policy during British Rule, The Beach Control Act of 1965, authorizes invitational development and rejects citizens' rights to access non-public beaches.<sup>2</sup> As it stands, only 1% of Jamaican beaches are public. The 1965 BCA also stated that all public beaches ought to be privatized as part of structural adjustments which led to the total stoppage of funding toward public beaches. Now, the few remaining public beaches are unmaintained and unusable.<sup>3</sup> The existing colonial policy that denies Jamaicans' rights to their beaches undermines the sovereignty of the Jamaican people and operates in sole favor of the multinational corporations' monetary goals. This current policy is detrimental to the socioeconomics of Jamaica because of its failure to recognize the human rights of Jamaicans, to stimulate local businesses and domestic industries, and to protect the environment and ecological heritage of Jamaica.

## Policy Idea

The Jamaican government should amend the prevailing colonial British Beach Control Act of 1956 and replace it with the ratification of Jamaican citizens' rights to public beaches and a restriction of privatization

initiatives on public beaches. The amendment should establish ecological heritage preservation status for at least 30% of Jamaican beaches and recognize access to public beaches as a human right. Structural adjustment programs should reduce the tax breaks for foreign investors to increase government revenue and reallocate funds back into the economic budget for the maintenance and operation of public beaches. The restriction of free market international trade and the institution of protectionist policies will stimulate the development of domestic markets and reduce the dependence of Jamaica on expensive imports and foreign trade. The government should implement an anti-free market reform until domestic industries in Jamaica are stable and profit-bearing. Finally, NEPA should create environmental regulation to prevent the environmental degradation of beaches from hospitality sites.

## Policy Analysis

The key objective of this proposed amendment is to largely expand the access of local beaches to citizens. Beaches are utilized by the public for various purposes ranging from recreation to fishing.



The Beach Control Act obstructs not only the human rights of Jamaicans but also the agricultural occupation of fishing, which is imperative to many independent workers on the island.<sup>4</sup> With rapid privatization, fisherpeople are relegated to beaches in distant cities and parishes and therefore are unable to work as frequently.<sup>5</sup> Expanding citizens' rights to beaches increases the social and economic prospects for the nation.

Anti-trade reform has functioned as an alternative to structural adjustments in some East Asian countries and Kenya. These East Asian countries adopted highly industrialized, export economies, which enjoyed stability and overall success.<sup>6</sup> Kenya also reformed its structural adjustment programs by instituting anti-trade legislation and tariffs to transform its failing agricultural sector into a booming domestic industry that is profitable through exports.<sup>7</sup> The main issue concerning Jamaica's economy is its reliance on tourism for revenue. Tourism is the dominant industry on the island; however, only 20% of profits circulate the country's economy.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the tourism industry exploits the cheap labor of islanders to pocket excess profit, which widens the wealth gap and severe wealth inequality. This detrimental and increasing reliance on foreign direct hospitality investments undermines the production and export prospects of Jamaica.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the lack of environmental regulations for establishments promoted degradation like the increase in sargassum, an accumulating type of algae, and beach erosion. Tourism establishments often disregard sustainable business to maximize

profit, which exhausts natural resources and irreparably tarnishes the landscape.<sup>10</sup>

### Highlights

- The Jamaican government should amend the Beach Control Act of 1956 and acknowledge access to public beaches as an unfettered human right for Jamaican citizens. In addition, the government should preserve 30% of Jamaican beaches as public ecological heritage sites and create de-establishment measures for reclaiming 29% of privatized beaches.
- The government should place limitations on tax break incentives, interest rates should be lowered, and tariffs should be implemented to de-incentivize foreign investment into Jamaica.
- The government should reallocate some government revenue into bolstering manufacturing and production, agriculture, and mining domestic industries to develop domestic markets and encourage an export-based economy. Additionally, they should reallocate remaining government revenue to refund public goods initiatives such as parks and beaches.
- The National Environmental and Planning Agency should create environmental protection surrounding ecological heritage preservation sites. Legislation should specify prohibitions on dumping,

construction on the foreshore, pollution, and beach degradation. The provision should provide for the removal of Sargassum using eco-friendly, appropriate waste management tools to eliminate the excessive rotting odor of the seaweed and the general visual eyesore for citizens.

### Implementation

This policy primarily combats three impending detriments to the Jamaican economy and society, namely, the denial of human rights and public beaches to Jamaican citizens, the defunding of domestic industries and loss of productive manufacturing and export power, and the lack of legal protection for environmental areas. The main objective of this policy is to streamline the process of amending the Beach Control Act and create specific provisions for the recognition of public beach access as a human and constitutional right. The 1956 edict states that "(4) No person shall be deemed to have any rights in or over the foreshore of this Island or the floor of the sea save such as are derived from or acquired or preserved under or by virtue of this Act."<sup>4</sup> The Beach Control Act essentially denies the right of Jamaican citizens to utilize private beaches and have legal protection in violation of this law, even though less than 1% of Jamaican beaches are public.

This amendment should additionally provide for the acquisition of a reasonable quantity for formerly public beaches. The plan should be executed by developing a budget for the

government purchase of 30% of privately owned beaches and a budget for renovation and restructuring of the beach for public operation. Due to the extensive nature of the project that aims to restore a fair quantity of beaches for recreation and aquaculture and reserve the remainder for the tourism industry, it is in the best interest for an operation of this magnitude to function on a decade to 15-year timeline.

The proposed amendment should be regulated and operated through two federal organizations: the National Environmental and Planning Agency and the Ministry of Finance. The proposal aims to further the development of and gain support from the non-tourism industry and domestic/local businesses, in addition to support from the general public. The proposal should also be spearheaded and supported by the environmental rights organization, Jamaica Beach Birthright Environmental Movement, a nonprofit advocating for the return of accessible public beaches and limitations on the scope of multinational corporations.<sup>11</sup>

Critics of this proposal may argue that the existing free trade agreements reduce inequality and consumer prices due to international trade. However, free trade reduces the profit of domestic producers and therefore redirects power from domestic to foreign markets, therefore, making the country reliant on foreign business and prone to exploitative practices from increased foreign investments.

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# Renewing the Mandate for the UN Investigative Team on ISIS War Crimes

By Olivia LaBonte, [oml7@cornell.edu](mailto:oml7@cornell.edu)

*The renewal of the UN Investigative Team on ISIS War Crimes beyond 2024 is crucial for global security and regional stability. The international community should ensure its continuity.*

## Background

Since its establishment in 2017, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) has played a pivotal role in documenting and preserving evidence of war crimes, including crimes against humanity and genocide committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). The investigative team tasked by the United Nations to collect evidence of ISIS's war crimes is posed to not have its mandate renewed beyond 2024.

The team's substantial contributions to advancing justice, accountability, and reconciliation in the region led to the extension of its mandate until 2024. The international community extended UNITAD's mandate in response to a formal request from the Government of Iraq, emphasizing a global commitment to supporting Iraq's pursuit of justice. During this extended period, the Special Adviser heading UNITAD will maintain the practice of submitting reports on the team's activities every 180 days.<sup>1</sup>

The termination of UNITAD's mandate would undoubtedly impair the response to Iraq's need for internal pursuit of justice for ISIS crimes. The debate over defining terrorism within a proposed amnesty bill in the Iraqi parliament

brings to light wider legal, ethical, and societal challenges, emphasizing the need for nuanced reform approaches. The use of such broad language could inadvertently release individuals affiliated with ISIS, undermining ongoing counterterrorism efforts and the pursuit of justice for victims. Complicating matters further is this decision by the United Nations Security Council to terminate the mandate of UNITAD, which has largely served as an enforcer of justice.<sup>2</sup>

The UN Secretary-General will provide information by January 15, 2024 and recommendations for implementing this decision while respecting Iraq's sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> This extension is a testament to the international community's dedication to addressing the heinous crimes committed by ISIS. It underscores the importance of continued efforts in documenting and prosecuting those responsible for these atrocities. Moreover, it reaffirms the commitment to justice, accountability, and the promotion of lasting peace in the region.

## Policy Idea

The international community should extend the mandate of the UN Investigative Team on ISIS War Crimes beyond 2024 to maintain its crucial mission. This extension is essential to ensure the relentless collection and

preservation of critical evidence related to war crimes committed by ISIS. Thus, the international community should demonstrate its commitment to promote accountability for the atrocities carried out and foster a more just world by supporting the team's mission beyond 2024.

## Policy Analysis

The renewal of UNITAD's work in prosecuting ISIS members can contribute to stabilizing conflict zones by dismantling terrorist networks and preventing potential resurgence. The previous decision to terminate its mandate lacked consultation with survivors and the necessary consultation with international and Iraqi human rights organizations.<sup>4</sup> Acknowledging limitations in prosecutions doesn't negate the value of continued investigations. The complexities of gathering evidence, especially in conflict zones, often prolong the accountability process. UNITAD's ongoing efforts are crucial for building solid cases, and extending the mandate ensures that investigations continue, thereby increasing the chances of successful prosecutions.

Recognizing that justice for crimes of this magnitude is a lengthy process is key. Without this mandate, the ongoing investigations could face disruptions, allowing perpetrators to escape

accountability. UNITAD gathers evidence and constructs cases against terrorists, in turn contributing to dismantling ISIS and preventing its resurgence. The team has located several ISIS leaders and members who have committed crimes against humanity, examined how ISIS developed and used chemical and biological weapons, and started looking into how cultural property has been destroyed in Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

The resolution presents an opportunity for the Security Council to consider future options for UNITAD, promoting stability and reconciliation in Iraq and the broader Middle East. Transitioning to local institutions for long-term accountability requires a stable and adequately developed judicial system, which may take time to establish, especially in post-conflict regions. UNITAD's work can be seen as a catalyst for strengthening local capacities and institutions, aiming for a smooth transition while ensuring justice doesn't slip through the cracks.

### Highlights

- The UN Investigative Team on ISIS War Crimes, initiated in 2017 to pursue legal action, has significantly advanced in cataloging the severe transgressions committed by ISIS. This effort has involved gathering crucial evidence vital for countering the global menace posed by this terrorist group.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite notable progress, the team confronts an imminent challenge: their current authorization, scheduled to conclude in 2024, necessitates an

extension to ensure ongoing investigations are finalized and new leads can be pursued. This extension holds paramount importance in achieving fairness and answerability while preventing immunity in the face of serious human rights violations.<sup>3</sup>

- The team's endeavors align with UN Security Council resolution 2170 (2014), which urged nations to prosecute ISIS perpetrators; however, recent decisions have complicated this pursuit.<sup>6</sup>
- The concurrent termination of UNITAD's mandate raises concerns about justice mechanisms and the fate of collected evidence, leaving victims without avenues for redress and potentially weakening global commitment to justice in Iraq.
- Renewing the team's mandate is a critical stride in upholding justice, combating the persistent threat of ISIS, and facilitating the essential processes of reconciliation and stabilization crucial for lasting peace in the affected areas.

### Implementation

The imperative to effectively address the persisting threat posed by ISIS necessitates a comprehensive and strategic approach to ensure the continuation of the mandate for UNITAD. Diplomatic acumen and finesse will play a pivotal role in this process, requiring a concerted effort to assuage any reservations among

member states and foster consensus regarding the critical importance of extending this crucial initiative.

This multifaceted approach involves engaging with individual member states, advocating the team's mission in influential international forums, and prioritizing collaborative efforts with nations profoundly impacted by ISIS, particularly Iraq. Sharing expertise and resources and facilitating information exchange will bolster the Investigative Team's credibility and broaden regional support for extending its mandate. The UN should coordinate consultative platforms, allowing member states to voice concerns and suggest enhancements to the Investigative Team's mandate and operational framework, emphasizing the global security implications. Cultivating a unified international stance requires diplomatic outreach to secure unequivocal support for renewing the mandate. Member states should highlight the indispensable role of the Investigative Team in ensuring accountability and preventing the resurgence of ISIS through decisive statements and extensive media outreach, thereby emphasizing its significance as a global security imperative. By orchestrating a diplomatic offensive, underscoring the team's pivotal role, fostering collaboration, and encouraging discourse, the UN can mobilize crucial support for renewing the Investigative Team's mandate, thus advancing the pursuit of justice, accountability, and global security.

In extending the mandate for the UN Investigative Team on ISIS War Crimes, a multifaceted approach is imperative. Understanding the diverse geopolitical interests and concerns

of member states is crucial; tailored diplomatic efforts must address sovereignty, resource allocation, and the perceived efficacy of the Investigative Team. Collaborating closely with nations directly affected by ISIS could amplify support for the mandate's extension. A comprehensive diplomatic campaign, engaging influential diplomats and leaders in international forums, will champion the cause, emphasizing the investigation and broader implications for global security and stability. Structured platforms within the UN will prioritize dialogue sessions, allowing member states to voice concerns and proposed enhancements to the Investigative Team's mandate, highlighting its adaptability without compromising core objectives. Utilizing public opinion and media outreach to showcase the Investigative Team's impact and the necessity of continued efforts against ISIS will indirectly influence member states' perspectives.

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# Strengthening the Cross-Border Privacy Rules Benefits Companies Too

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*Strengthening the Cross-Border Privacy Rules' (CBPR) data protection standards to align with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) while maintaining its accountability-based enforcement mechanism will better protect personal information across borders and streamline the compliance processes for multinational businesses.*

## Background

The CBPR began in 2011 as an APEC initiative; its membership includes the US, Mexico, Japan, Canada, Singapore, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, and the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> Its purpose is to ensure that personal information transferred to another country is protected with similar standards.

Instead of an entire country adopting a set of laws, the CBPR allows individual companies to certify their compliance with CBPR data protection standards with accountability agents appointed and overseen by a national data protection agency.<sup>2</sup> Accountability agents are contractually obliged to monitor the compliance of certified companies in exchange for the rights to the CBPR trademark. The accountability agent is also contractually empowered to notify the government, withdraw certification, or impose monetary penalties for noncompliance.

Unfortunately, the CBPR often represents a minimum standard – many countries have national laws stricter than the CBPR. Most notably, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), which governs the third largest economy in the world, argues that it has the "toughest privacy and security laws in the world" and that the CBPR's

protections are "clearly of a lower level."<sup>4,5,6</sup> Consequently, CBPR-certified companies must still navigate a patchwork of differing national standards. Furthermore, more regulated jurisdictions restrict the transfer of information to less regulated jurisdictions, thus creating trade barriers that inhibit digital trade for companies like multinationals and e-commerce or social media platforms.<sup>7</sup> To access EU data, companies from less regulated jurisdictions have to engage in months-long negotiations on their companies' privacy policies with three EU countries' data protection regulators.<sup>8</sup> This process is known as the Binding Corporate Rules.<sup>9</sup> Prohibiting companies from transferring data abroad will make it much costlier to do business in other countries, even increasing the cost of cloud computing services by an estimated 30-60%.<sup>10</sup>

## Policy Idea

To become an impactful and relevant system, the CBPR should align its standards with GDPR by

1. Only allowing companies to collect publicly available data on a user only if it is necessary to provide a service and if the user is notified.<sup>11</sup>
2. Requiring that a subject's consent for collecting

personal information be "freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous."<sup>12</sup>

3. Mandating that companies inform affected users and governments when a data breach occurs.<sup>11</sup>
4. Requiring companies to appoint a Data Protection Officer with data protection expertise to help implement regulations.<sup>13</sup>
5. Requiring a Data Protection Impact Assessment, which identifies the risks and mitigation measures in situations with a high risk of harm to individuals.<sup>13,14</sup>

## Policy Analysis

Beyond better-protecting users, strengthening the CBPR would also benefit companies. Adopting these recommendations would help the CBPR attain EU recognition as an equivalent form of data protection, which would allow CBPR companies to bypass the Binding Corporate Rules approval process. Instead, companies merely need to certify with a local CBPR accountability agent via a standardized questionnaire and arrange for an assessment.<sup>15,16</sup>

The CBPR's accountability-based enforcement mechanism is also more suitable for countries

with diverse circumstances and levels of development by giving individual companies the choice of whether they should certify or not. The CBPR also avoids the politically complex process of forcing countries to adopt identical privacy laws akin to the EU's approach because it only requires governments to enforce the certified company's contractual obligations under the CBPR – which is usually covered by existing contract or trademark law.<sup>17</sup>

The CBPR's accountability-based enforcement mechanism is effective and would not inhibit it from securing EU recognition. The EU previously mistrusted non-EU data protection authorities by requiring companies outside the EU to be directly accountable to the company exporting EU data “in the context of their bilateral relationship”.<sup>6</sup> The EU recently implicitly abandoned this objection with the EU-US Data Privacy Framework adopted in July 2023, which allows companies in the US to self-certify their compliance with the GDPR “under US law” – akin to the CBPR's approach.<sup>18,19</sup> The legal enforceability of CBPR under local law was evident when the US Federal Trade Commission took action against 13 companies that falsely claimed CBPR certification in 2019.<sup>20</sup>

### Highlights

- The CBPR mandates data protection standards that are often less stringent than EU and some national laws. Consequently, being CBPR-certified often does not always reduce the amount of compliance paperwork a company has to perform

when conducting international business.<sup>7</sup>

- Strengthening the CBPR's data protection standards to better align with the EU's GDPR allows certified companies to better protect users while more easily gaining access to European markets compared to the current Binding Corporate Rules approval procedure.<sup>2,8,9</sup>
- The CBPR enforces these standards by having national data protection agencies and appointed accountability agents certify and audit companies. Instead of the traditional approach where all companies comply with a legislatively mandated standard, the CBPR enforces its standards through a contractual relationship with the certified company.<sup>2</sup>
- This accountability-based approach firstly offers unique flexibility and choice to individual companies whether they wish to certify. Furthermore, the CBPR lowers the political cost for adaptation by not requiring additional legislation while not compromising its legal enforceability.<sup>2,17</sup>

### Implementation

Since 2022, CBPR members have been negotiating a Global CBPR system to expand the CBPR worldwide. Global CBPR is designed to be “independently administered and separate” from the existing APEC CBPR, which means a potential opportunity for substantial change.<sup>21</sup> Although Global CBPR has not yet been finalized, existing information

about the negotiations indicates that no major changes are under consideration. The founding consensus of the Global CBPR states that it would be “based on the APEC Privacy Framework” – the same as APEC CBPR.<sup>11</sup>

The existing ‘APEC Privacy Framework’ represents an existing compromise between countries with higher and lower data protection standards. Rebuilding multilateral consensus is often a difficult and time-consuming process. However, less regulated countries should recognize that since the latest revision of the APEC Privacy Framework in 2015, global data protection standards have risen. Furthermore, global internet traffic in 2022 was more than five times that of 2015 and is thus an increasingly urgent imperative to sustain global economic growth.<sup>21,22</sup>

More regulated countries can offer several incentives to convince less regulated countries to subscribe to higher standards. Firstly, the EU and other more regulated countries can declare that CBPR certification constitutes full compliance with national privacy legislation instead of the currently vague promise to “take all reasonable and appropriate steps to identify and remove unnecessary barriers to information flows.”<sup>22</sup> A strengthened CBPR would make it easier for more regulated countries to recognize the CBPR without lowering their own standards. Secondly, more regulated economies can promise digital economy agreements (DEA) down the line, which are built upon confidence in each others' digital environment and data protection standards. Existing DEA initiatives between Singapore, Australia, New-

Zealand, Chile, and the UK include interoperable digital payment systems, identities, and trade documents – all of which make doing business easier.<sup>23,24</sup>

If members mandate higher standards for Global CBPR, the next step would be recertifying existing accountability agents and companies. A strengthened Global CBPR would require companies to adopt additional safeguards as opposed to the existing plan in which “All approved Accountability Agents and certified companies will automatically be recognized in the new Global CBPR Forum”.<sup>21</sup> There can be expedited approval processes in which currently certified companies only need to demonstrate their compliance with certain additional criterion to become certified under a strengthened CBPR.

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# Combatting Heritage Site Destruction Through UK Antiquity Trafficking Regulation

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*The United Kingdom should establish import regulations on culturally significant archeological artifacts to combat heritage site destruction and mitigate criminal and terrorist organizations' money laundering.*

## Background

Across the globe, heritage sites stand as testaments to ancient civilizations' cultural legacies. This mystique has made them a prime target for organized crime groups that launder money through cultural goods trafficking.<sup>1</sup> Artifact trafficking is a lucrative trade for terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) who ransack heritage sites in the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> Pillaging in Armenia's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Ukraine and China's demolition of the Kashgar Old City in Xinjiang have destroyed many sites and left artifacts unaccounted for.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

In 2017, the European Union's (EU) European Commission (EC) launched an investigation in response to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), G20, and G7 leaders' demands for further preventative measures against the illicit market.<sup>6</sup> In response, the EC adopted Resolution 2019/880 "Regulation on the Introduction and the Import of Cultural Goods" in 2019. The regulation is designed to increase art market transparency by requiring licenses for artifact imports over 250 years old and mandating substantial proof that the artifacts were legally obtained from the countries from which they were sourced.<sup>7</sup> Following the resolution's

adoption, UNESCO mobilized the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) to quash trafficking rings. Other European efforts include Operation Pandora, an annual international operation created in 2016 to target and prosecute fraudulent traders.<sup>8</sup>

Negotiations during the United Kingdom's exit from the EU in 2020 resulted in the country rejecting the domestic implementation of the EC's Resolution 2019/880.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, the UK abstained from Operation Pandora for the first time since 2019.<sup>10</sup> Notably, there are no licensing requirements for importing items of "cultural interest" in the UK.<sup>11</sup> As the world's second-largest art market in the world in 2022, an unregulated UK creates a gaping legal loophole in Europe's art market amidst the EU's stringent artifact regulations.<sup>12</sup>

## Policy Idea

To combat the irreversible damage being wreaked upon global heritage sites and to prevent criminal and terrorist organizations from exploiting the UK's lack of regulation, the UK should enact legislation regulating the import of cultural goods that include:

1. A cultural artifact licensing system based upon the importer obtaining statements from a proper

authority of the country from which the artifact was sourced;

2. A clause specifically outlining what time frame classifies an item as a "cultural good" (e.g. 150 years, 200 years);
3. A cultural good import tariff comparable to its current art import VAT rate (5%) to encourage the licit trade while discouraging criminal organizations from exploiting the country's rate.<sup>13</sup>

## Policy Analysis

Regulating cultural goods imports is integral to blocking terrorist organizations' funds and protecting the UK's national security. Profit estimates for the illegal antiquity trade are vague and vary widely depending on the source. In 2016, Iraqi and Russian officials estimated that ISIS could have been generating \$100 to \$200 million annually from trafficking Iraqi and Syrian cultural goods.<sup>14</sup> Independent research teams, such as the University of Chicago's Modeling the Antiquities Trade in Iraq and Syria, are building databases to measure terrorist organizations' profits and document looting routes.<sup>15</sup> However, accurately tracking terrorist organizations' funds is impossible

without international regulatory cooperation.

Existing data shows that the UK is a key trafficking route. A 2020 study conducted by the RAND Corporation listed the UK as one of the countries where looted antiquities were primarily sold.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the country dominated eBay Roman antiquity listings when studied over 30 days with over 5,000 antiquities sold, while other EU member states listed (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Austria, and Germany) sold approximately 300-600 each.<sup>16</sup> The EU's regulations have been successful thus far, and emulating them in UK policy will yield similar results. EUROPOL's crackdown lasted from 2017 to 2021 and resulted in the seizure of 213,700 stolen cultural goods.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, authorities participating in Operation Pandora have seized over 150,000 illicit artifacts since its inception.<sup>10</sup> UK law enforcement agencies can utilize preexisting research to estimate the crime's scope and gauge the resources needed to address it.

### Highlights

- Heritage sites are a primary target for criminal and terrorist groups that loot their cultural goods, exploit a lack of standardization to artificially inflate their prices, and sell them at auctions to launder their funds.
- Following a 2017 investigation, the EU adopted stringent regulations against the import of cultural goods without proper licensing and authorization from the country the artifact was

sourced. EUROPOL's crackdown on the illicit antiquities market has been successful—EUROPOL recovered over 200,000 items, and Operation Pandora seized over 150,000.<sup>10</sup>

- The UK withdrew from the EU in 2020 and subsequently rejected the EU's resolution. As a result, there are no license requirements for importing items of "cultural interest." As the world's second-largest art market, the UK is a hotspot for the art trade. A lack of regulation has been shown to attract unlawful antiquity dealers.<sup>12,16</sup>
- Implementing a licensing system in the UK and a low import tariff will hold importers accountable for their goods while stimulating the legal market.

### Implementation

The British Parliament's Select Committee on Culture, Media, and Sport should be primarily responsible for crafting legislation to regulate items of cultural interest.<sup>11</sup> The Committee is located within the House of Commons, so the bill would likely originate in the chamber. In 2000, the Committee heard testimony from law enforcement and art stakeholders about the country's role in trafficking. Witnesses substantiated the claim that many stolen or illegally exported objects were laundered in London but disagreed on the scope.<sup>17</sup> Market stakeholders opposed to reform questioned the integrity of trafficking estimates, claiming it was "impossible to attach a firm

financial value to the [trade]" and that sellers had distanced themselves from the traffic.<sup>17</sup> Following the hearing, the Committee's Seventh Report concluded that existing measures must be examined, but action was never taken.<sup>17</sup> The Committee's previous investigation demonstrates that initiating a reform effort is achievable and aligns with the Committee's ideals of supporting the arts.<sup>18</sup> A hearing with law enforcement witnesses should be held to ensure updated and accurate testimonials.

Data shows that regulation would not damage the UK art market. Art traders and investors criticized the EU for implementing policies they felt would stifle the antiquities trade and shrink the overall art market. However, the EU's art markets in France, Spain, and Italy saw substantial rebounds post-regulation.<sup>19</sup> In 2022, the global art market reached its second-highest recorded peak at \$67.8 billion.<sup>12</sup> France's market shattered records, peaking at just under \$5 billion, and the entire EU advanced to an estimated \$8.8 billion. Considering these statistics, the EU's art market was undamaged and substantially grew post-regulation. However, the Committee should spearhead an outreach campaign to convince art market stakeholders that regulations are unlikely to damage the market by referring to the EU's statistics. The cultural goods import VAT rate should be equivalent to the 5% art import VAT to encourage the licit trade.<sup>13</sup>

Dealers also criticized the bureaucratic hurdles placed on small-scale dealers. Logistical hurdles may be encountered in the enforcement period. The UK

accounts for 18% of the global art market, while the entire EU shares 12%.<sup>20</sup> Considering the UK's larger market share, the licensing process may be bottlenecked. The UK's Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest regulates the export of cultural goods. This department's jurisdiction could expand to include import regulation as well. This expansion could provide a pre-existing bureaucratic structure that will accelerate implementation.<sup>21</sup> A 2019 joint study by the Institute for Government, an independent British think tank, and the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government found that the UK Civil Service ranked third worldwide in policy-making, encapsulating coordination and implementation.<sup>22</sup> An expanded Reviewing Committee combined with the country's bureaucratic efficiency will erect hurdles for criminal organizations, establish rapport with conscientious art marketeers while rewarding them with an expeditious system, and prevent the destruction of heritage sites.

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# HEALTHCARE POLICY

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# Expanding the Food and Drug Administration's Race and Ethnicity Diversity Plan Criteria to Minimize Knowledge Gaps of Drug Safety and Efficacy

By Ava Boris, [amb688@cornell.edu](mailto:amb688@cornell.edu)

*There exists a disparity in the assumed health and safety standards for many medical technologies between various communities due to a disproportionate emphasis on white clinical trial patients. For this, Congress should require the FDA to issue patient diversity quotas to trial sponsors applying for the federal review process to ensure steps are being taken to increase diversity in medical research.*

## Background

According to recent US Census data, nearly 40 percent of Americans identify as a racial or ethnic minority; however, up to between 80 and 90 percent of clinical trial participants identify as white.<sup>1</sup> A Harvard Medical School report described this discrepancy as a severe danger to public health, as only including participants from a narrow demographic group leads to non-generalizable results.<sup>2</sup> This decreased generalizability means that treatments could have reduced efficacy and even be harmful to particular groups of people.<sup>2</sup> Identifying this lack of diversity as an issue of public safety, Congress passed the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993, necessitating the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to raise diversity requirements for clinical trial patient pools.<sup>3</sup> The policy was predominately effective in increasing the number of female patients used in clinical research and had lesser positive impacts on increasing racial diversity.<sup>3</sup> However, since the act only regulated NIH-funded studies, which account for only 6% of US-based trials, the effects of this

policy were not wide-reaching.<sup>1</sup> Namely, a 2014 study found that less than two percent of the over 10,000 cancer clinical trials the National Cancer Institute funds concentrated research on members of a racial or ethnic minority.<sup>4</sup> The Food and Drug Omnibus Reform Act (FDORA) within the 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act mandates clinical trial sponsors submit “diversity action plans” for specific late-stage drug trials to the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>5</sup> These plans must include the sponsor’s goals for clinical study enrollment, the sponsor’s rationale, and an explanation of how the sponsor intends to satisfy these goals.<sup>6</sup> While a key step in increasing DEI initiatives into clinical trial recruiting, FDORA fails to mandate such plans from sponsors testing a wider range of drugs.

## Policy Idea

The FDA should implement updated diversity and equity standards for all clinical trials marketing to the public at large. This process involves updating application approval standards to include patient background

thresholds. Congress should require the FDA to issue patient diversity quotas to trial sponsors applying for the federal review process. By using these patient-reported measures of racial and ethnic background, trial sponsors should create more equitable research objectives to better the generalizability of safety and efficacy measures.

## Policy Analysis

A 2022 study published in the National Library of Medicine found that increasing clinical trial participants diversity requirements and establishing inclusion in diversity plans leads to increases in three primary endpoints: 1) ensuring committed trial participation across races and ethnicities, 2) enabling the participation of historically underrepresented groups, 3) allowing for the embracing of patient-centric bioanalytical and digital health technologies with the intent of increasing accessibility.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities 2021-2025 Strategic Plan accounts, nine goals are sought to achieve the three outcomes outlined by the 2022 study. Of these

nine goals, three have been identified as the most feasible courses of action, they are as follows: advance scientific understanding of the causes of health disparities; improve scientific methods, metrics, measures, and tools that support health disparities research; and ensure appropriate representation of minority and other health disparity populations in NIH-funded research.<sup>7</sup> Such outcomes benefited the unintended disparities in safety and efficacy standards by accounting for the differences that can arise based on an individual's characteristics.<sup>8</sup> Evaluation of trial participants by these criteria has shown significant positive effects. Using this model to alleviate approximately one percent of health disparities would result in more than \$40 billion in gains for diabetes research and \$60 billion for heart disease research.<sup>9</sup> Results are comparable for similar disease states.<sup>9</sup>

### Highlights

- In the United States, there exists a severe issue with how the safety and efficacy of drug compounds are promised to differing demographics. Despite nearly 40 percent of Americans identifying as a racial or ethnic minority, 85% of clinical trial participants identify as white.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite increasing initiatives to expand diversity among clinical trial participants, one study found that less than two percent of the over 10,000 cancer clinical trials the National Cancer Institute funds concentrated research

on members of a racial or ethnic minority.<sup>4</sup>

- A 2022 study published in the National Library of Medicine found that increasing clinical trial participants' diversity requirements and establishing inclusion in diversity plans leads to increased participation of historically underrepresented groups and the embracing of patient-centric bioanalytical and digital health technologies seen to increase accessibility.<sup>7</sup>
- Using clinical trial participants' diversity requirements has been seen to exponentially increase gains from research.<sup>9</sup> To this end, the FDA should implement updated diversity and equity standards for all clinical trials marketing to the public at large. This process involves updating application approval standards to include patient background thresholds. Congress should require the FDA to issue patient diversity quotas to trial sponsors applying for the federal review process.

### Implementation

For the ease of drafting and passing the proposed legislation, the support of various lobbyists groups should be called upon. First, the National Medical Association represents African American physicians and advocates for the health and well-being of African American patients. They may be interested in supporting initiatives that aim to improve diversity and

inclusion in clinical trials.<sup>10</sup> Other groups such as the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute and National Hispanic Medical Association should serve as key lobbyists.<sup>11,12</sup> Lastly, by targeting specific Congressional members who have voiced an interest in this issue would benefit the proposals viability. Representative Adam Schiff of California and Representative Robin Kelly of Illinois are two such members who have incorporated healthcare equity into their policy goals for their terms.<sup>13,14</sup> More specifically, Representative Schiff's "Equal Health Care For All Bill" aimed to protect access to equitable health care throughout the country by establishing a definition for "inequitable health care" to help ensure that hospitals provide equal care to all patients that come in the door.<sup>13</sup>

To attain maximum effectiveness and efficiency in implementation following passage and approval through Congress, this policy should be developed and regulated by the FDA directly. It would be the agency's job to formulate and amend this statute as it sees fit. However, these alterations to the proposed policy would not come without the opportunity for public feedback, as the Federal Register would have to issue notice on how interested parties could submit written data, views, or arguments on the proposal. The FDA would address all submissions directly in subsequent publications during the agency's final decision-making process. The in-depth incorporation of public concern, even so late into the implementation process, aids in increasing public support for the measure.<sup>15</sup> Possible expanders to



this policy that would benefit the successful implementation of this policy include the African American Wellness Project (AAWP) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In fact, the NAACP even launched a national campaign in 2022 to inform and educate communities about the importance of encouraging African Americans' participation in clinical trial studies.<sup>16</sup> However, potential backlash could arise from drug developers, stemming from their disapproval of the increased requirements issued for drug approval. By adding a new threshold that needs to be met for a compound to achieve FDA approval, it is effectively more complex and expensive to obtain such clearance. Despite this pushback, the policy's public health benefits would outweigh this comparably minor inconvenience. Others may claim that setting new patient inclusion requirements would impede innovation, stating that if companies can guarantee a diverse enough patient population, they are less likely to go through with possibly lucrative. Since there have been hundreds of new requirements added for drug approval since the formation of the FDA and no such spurred development, we can dismiss and ease these concerns.<sup>17</sup>

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# Medical School Debt Relief: Making Primary Care the Primary Healthcare Concern

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*The federal government should enact a policy that couples medical school debt relief for primary care residents with additional primary care residency positions. Doing so solves the current and impending primary care physician shortage.*

## Background

The American physician shortage is a pressing issue. According to a 2022 Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) study, there is an expected physician shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 American physicians by 2034.<sup>1</sup> One specialty in particular is experiencing the effects of this shortage by a disproportionately large amount: primary care. In the same study, of the total projected physician shortage, between 17,800 and 48,000 of the physician shortages are expected to be from primary care.<sup>1</sup> This shortage is especially alarming, because primary care is essential to preventative medicine. According to the National Institutes of Health, primary care effectively prevents illness and death and is associated with equitable health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Since primary care is critical and effective, more physicians should go into primary care to help alleviate these concerns. However, the expected salary for primary care physicians poses a significant roadblock for medical students to choose primary care. For the average student at a public medical school in 2019, student debt after graduation was around \$193,000.<sup>3</sup> Assuming a 15-year loan with 6% interest, a family practice or pediatrics primary care resident would have monthly

student loan payments taking 28% of their post-tax income. As a young attending primary care physician (PCP), a family medicine or pediatrics doctor still must pay 11% and 14% of their monthly post-tax incomes in student loans, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Due to such sizable medical debt in proportion to their early resident/physician salaries, many medical students are discouraged from pursuing primary care.

## Policy Idea

Since medical debt is disproportionately large for PCPs compared to physicians in other specialties, the federal government should provide a 50% medical school debt relief to all physicians who enroll in a primary care residency program in the United States. Additionally, since residency positions are the bottleneck for physician employment, a yearly increase in federally funded primary care residency positions should also occur as part of this policy, based on the trends of the prior year's primary care residency applications. In the first year, the policy should add 250 vacancies as a starting point. Funding for this policy should come from negotiated taxes with health insurance companies, hospitals, and health systems.

## Policy Analysis

Policy in action that has lowered medical school debt has increased the number of primary care professionals. For example, the Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons announced a \$250 million donation to reduce medical tuition in 2017 to allow more students to go into primary care.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, research studies have advocated for policies decreasing medical schools' financial burden to increase PCPs and begin eliminating unequal geographical and specialty distributions. Accordingly, one study cites that medical students from rural areas and underrepresented minority students are more likely to become PCPs but have increased financial barriers preventing them from pursuing medicine. This policy could therefore increase access to medicine and primary care positions for these disadvantaged groups.<sup>5</sup>

A similar policy, the Pennsylvania Primary Care Loan Repayment Program, is also aimed at increasing the number of PCPs by lowering medical school debt burden. This application-based program awards PCPs in underserved areas with \$80,000 in loan repayment. Doctors from all primary care specialties are eligible.<sup>6</sup> Other programs have also offered loan forgiveness but have

failed to reduce the disparity between pay for specialized physicians and PCPs, making these policies ineffective at boosting the number of PCPs. This was largely because such a policy would not lower medical debt burden in proportion to income for PCPs more than specialists, failing to incentivize more medical school graduates to choose primary care.<sup>7</sup> Medical school debt relief offered under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program has given a very high percentage of debt forgiveness funds to specialists.<sup>7</sup> To combat the growing disparity between the number and pay of PCPs and specialists, this policy would explicitly target PCPs.

### Highlights

- By 2034, the AAMC projects that there will be a physician shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 physicians in America of which 17,800 to 48,000 will be from primary care.<sup>1</sup>
- Primary care is an essential component of preventative medicine that reduces overall medical expenditures and promotes equitable health outcomes with widespread care.<sup>2</sup>
- Medical schools, such as Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, have already vowed to lower medical school tuition to incentivize more students to enter primary care.<sup>4</sup>
- Medical school debt relief to specifically increase the number of PCPs must only offer debt relief to PCPs to reduce the relative income

disparity between PCPs and specialty physicians.<sup>7</sup>

- The proposed policy would offer 50% medical school debt relief to medical students enrolled in a primary care residency program, along with resources for new primary care residency positions in teaching hospitals nationwide.
- Funds for this policy would come from a mix of taxes on health insurance companies, health systems, and hospitals.

### Implementation

Besides patients, the main stakeholders in this policy are health insurance companies, health systems, hospitals, and physicians. Aside from general taxes on American taxpayers, the vast majority of funds for this policy should come from taxes on health insurers, hospital systems, and health insurance companies.

The most prominent example of health insurers and hospital/health systems successfully negotiating tax imposition is the Affordable Care Act (ACA). During ACA negotiations, health insurers responded to carrot and stick negotiations, with the federal government's stick being to add a Medicare option onto the ACA exchanges.<sup>8</sup>

The carrot in these negotiations should be the cost-savings to healthcare because of the increased prevalence of primary care with more primary care physicians. Since primary care is associated with lower healthcare costs and more equitable outcomes, health insurers and hospital systems should be open to these investments

because they could lower expenses for healthcare services and advance the goals of health equity that many of these companies practice.<sup>9</sup>

Once again, the stick in these negotiations should be adding a public Medicare option for all on the health insurance exchanges. Since Medicare plans have much lower copays, citizens shopping for health plans on the exchanges would be much more inclined to pick the Medicare option on the exchanges, posing a substantial threat to the business of health insurers.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Medicare pays physicians substantially less for provided medical services, which would threaten hospitals and health systems if policymakers offered low-copay Medicare plans to the general public on the health insurance exchanges.<sup>8</sup> If health insurers and hospitals aren't inclined to agree to find this policy because of the carrot, the stick should be much more convincing because of its threat to their bottom line.

Lastly, political push-back and the feasibility of such an expensive policy is a considerable concern. To combat such obstacles, policymakers should emphasize the importance of primary care as preventative care in medicine to communicate the cost efficacy of increased primary care. Additionally, the potentiality of health systems and health insurance companies refusing to negotiate taxes to fund this policy is a limitation. In such a case, the policy should lower proportions of medical debt relief for primary care residents to reduce the cost to the federal government.

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# Enforcing Financial Accountability in Long-Term Care Systems to Reduce Mistreatment

By Susan Hickey, [sph74@cornell.edu](mailto:sph74@cornell.edu)

*Older adults in long-term care systems face high rates of mistreatment which is hidden due to the neglect of proper financial reporting standards; the United States should reform Section 6104 of the ACA to increase financial accountability and transparency.*

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed many sobering facts about the shortcomings of the United States' long-term care system, including, but not limited to, inadequate staffing, failures in regulation, and poor infection control.<sup>1</sup> This deficiency was seen in that “despite making up less than one-half of 1 percent of the U.S. population...nursing home residents accounted for approximately 19 percent of all COVID-19 deaths.”<sup>1</sup> Compared to other people aged 65 and over living outside of nursing homes in the U.S., long-term care residents had a death rate 24 times higher.<sup>2</sup> Current ACA guidelines don't require clear transparency of long-term care annual expenditures, which exacerbates quality issues and misallocation of funding. Annual expenditures fall into four categories: (1) direct care staff, (2) indirect care (including housekeeping and dietary services), (3) capital assets, and (4) administrative services costs.<sup>3</sup> Nursing homes and assisted living facilities have exploited profits through related-party transactions.<sup>4</sup> This manipulation allows them to “legally pull money out of the nursing homes as expenses and hide the profits through these third-party contractors,” which have the same owners.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence that these facilities spend less on

staffing and end up with poorer quality ratings overall. Yet, they will still request more money during the new mandatory staffing law implementation.<sup>5</sup>

## Policy Idea

Policymakers should reform Section 6104 of the ACA to increase financial accountability and transparency, including monetary penalties for failure to comply with current reporting standards. If long-term care homes cannot meet the financial penalties, regulating bodies should implement federal monitoring boards to establish a set standard of conduct. There is currently no incentive to publish these financial statements, and a monetary fine that increases alongside the duration of lateness would force transparency. Additionally, this section should make data readily available to the public stakeholders, not just under request. This accessibility aim should be a single CMS database in a format that is easy to understand and interpret, organized by facility and chain. The reporting should break down annual expenditures, including disclosure of owners, to highlight possible related-party transactions.

## Policy Analysis

Long-term care facilities must comply with these new

transparency regulations to ensure taxpayers' dollars fund quality care. The elderly population is already physically and politically vulnerable and often lacks the advocacy to stand up for themselves. This initiative will improve public trust, ensure proper resource allocation, and enhance the quality of care. It is vital to focus on chains, as they tend to be more exploitative, especially since the ten largest chains of nursing facilities own over 10% of all skilled nursing facilities.<sup>6</sup> This disclosure would also reduce requests for more government funding since facilities would have to be upfront with how much money is not already going to care services. Almost 75% of US nursing homes had “related-party transactions” in 2015, accounting for \$11 billion of nursing home spending.<sup>7</sup> This financial transparency would reveal where these exploitative habits are most rampant and would ideally reallocate money toward quality instead of surplus salaries for those in charge. Globally, 1.6% of world deaths in children stem from such corruption.<sup>8</sup> Children are not a perfect comparison group for older adults, but they are in similar vulnerable situations in which their health can be strongly impacted by healthcare delivery corporations. While the long-term care population in the United States is much

smaller, it is also a more concentrated demographic that is victim to high rates of financial corruption. Theoretically, implementing financial transparency would reduce the deaths from this fraud and subsequent negligence.

### Highlights

- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical deficiencies in the United States' long-term care system, notably inadequate staffing and poor infection control, disproportionately impacting nursing home residents.<sup>1</sup>
- Proposed reforms target Section 6104 of the ACA, advocating for increased financial transparency and accountability in long-term care. This reform includes monetary penalties for non-compliance, escalating with lateness duration, and the establishment of monitoring boards.
- The policy analysis underscores the exploitation within large chains, which own over 10% of nursing facilities.<sup>6</sup> Related-party transactions, enabling profit concealment, are concerning practices that the proposed regulations aim to expose and discourage.
- Compliance with new transparency regulations is crucial for ensuring taxpayer funds contribute to quality care. Focusing on financial transparency aims to improve public trust, enhance resource allocation, and ultimately elevate the overall quality of care for the vulnerable elderly

population in long-term care facilities.

### Implementation

It is crucial to appeal to policymakers and constituents to gain support for this reform. Partnering with lobbyists will aid in the effort to get more politicians in support of passing this amendment. While the timeline for this is flexible, it would ideally gain enough traction within a year of the initial proposal. It would be beneficial to get experts on elder mistreatment and financial fraud involved, such as gerontologists, elder justice lawyers, and policy analysts. Families of aging adults are a crucial voter section to target, as well as older adults specifically, as this mistreatment mostly impacts them. Many facility owners would likely need time to evaluate their assets and may have questions about new formatting and qualification regulations and expectations. Past monitoring process attempts lacked the independent research to verify that they improved resident care. However, experts postulate that the monitoring of nursing homes that had previously taken financial advantage of residents reduced the misallocation of funds.<sup>8</sup> This proposal would go through Congress and seeing as financial transparency has historically been a bipartisan issue, it should be passed once the final logistics are ameliorated. For effective implementation of this policy, a financial committee of lawmakers is necessary. This committee should find ways to standardize and review these financial sets and what monetary red flags to look for. Penalties for inaccurate data could potentially harm smaller facilities;

thus, parameters to instill more leniency for individual facilities or have penalties made proportional to a system's assets are critical. A six-month facility check-in should occur with lawmakers to eliminate uncertainty about expected facility documentation. Post-implementation, the facilities should have a year to compile and submit their revised annual consolidated financial reports to the monitoring boards.

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# Establishing a Comprehensive Financial Relief Program for Biogen and Eisai's Novel Alzheimer's Disease Drug Leqembi to Medicaid Beneficiaries Aged 50 and Older

By Rachel Kim, [rhk76@cornell.edu](mailto:rhk76@cornell.edu)

In light of the new Alzheimer's disease drug, the New York State Department of Health's (NYSDOH) Alzheimer's Disease Community Assistance Program should implement a robust financial relief initiative, enhancing accessibility and optimizing the drug's impact for the elderly population.

## Background

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive developmental brain disease that results in memory loss and cognitive functions, interfering with daily life.<sup>1</sup> AD incidence has occurred in over 6 million Americans, and at least one in nine adults over the age of 65 is diagnosed with the condition.<sup>2</sup> Currently, AD rates are projected to continue increasing to 12.7 million individuals in the US by 2050.<sup>2</sup> In particular, New York State (NYS) has the fourth largest elderly population in the country and its elderly population is projected to account for 25% of the state population by 2025, while also having the second highest number of individuals diagnosed with AD.<sup>3</sup> Within this elderly population, low-income and people of color are shown to be more at risk of AD within NYS.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the rapidly increasing AD incidence in the country, there have been no disease-modifying treatment options for Alzheimer's, leaving patients to seek solely treatments that alleviate symptoms. However, biotechnology companies Biogen and Eisai's newly released drug Leqembi is the first AD medication to be approved

by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that has shown true efficacy in disease modification during a Phase 3 clinical trial.<sup>5</sup> The FDA initially granted Leqembi Accelerated Approval earlier this year, and subsequently granted Traditional Approval after the completion of Study 301, a Phase 3 randomized double-controlled trial involving almost 2,000 patients. This study was able to effectively demonstrate a statistically significant difference between treatment groups.<sup>5</sup> By increasing incentives for those younger than Medicare beneficiaries to receive Leqembi, there is lower risk of developing AD in the future and moving toward a prevention-based model in NYS.

## Policy Idea

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) should establish a comprehensive financial relief program within their Alzheimer's Disease Community Assistance Program (AlzCAP) to increase affordability of the Leqembi drug for Medicaid beneficiaries aged 50 and older.<sup>6</sup> This program would provide financial assistance in the form of

essential subsidies and co-payment assistance, ensuring that finances are not the barrier for access to treatment options for AD. In addition to the hub of educational resources, the 24-hour Helpline available in over 200 languages, and in-person and virtual support groups for patients and caregivers alike, the addition of this program would satisfy the economical assistance in terms of access to preventative care. With the growing senior population, New York State can help mitigate the rising AD trends and enhance the quality of life for its senior residents.

## Policy Analysis

Alzheimer's disease is caused by the accumulation of amyloid plaques, where amyloid- $\beta$  ( $A\beta$ ) peptides commonly form 42 amino acid structures called  $A\beta$ -42 that aggregate as protofilaments.<sup>7</sup> Leqembi works to remove such plaques and slow cognitive decline by 27% within 18 months in adults with early-stage AD.<sup>8</sup> As the first drug to effectively slow disease development for AD, Leqembi should be made more widely available and accessible for vulnerable populations.

While Medicare beneficiaries are covered by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services with 20% coinsurance after paying the Part B deductible, there are no specific programs in place for low-income individuals under 65 years of age that can help relieve the burden of the hefty annual cost of Leqembi at \$26,500. Many large insurers such as Highmark are not looking to approve coverage of the drug due to its high costs, and insurers such as Kaiser Permanente and Elevance Health who are offering coverage require pre-approval steps that make it difficult to receive access to the drug.<sup>9</sup> Research shows that the amyloid plaque aggregates can begin forming years, even decades, prior to the appearance of symptoms, suggesting that the current arbitrary standard of 65 years in providing assistance for Leqembi could be too late for treating early-stage AD.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, NYSDOH should establish a financial assistance program within AlzCAP dedicated to Leqembi funding, especially in regards to the aging population in the US. Such a program can provide financial assistance to this subset of beneficiaries, as they are not covered by Medicare until 65 years of age and are likely prone to developing early-stage AD during this crucial decade between 50 and 60 years of age.

### Highlights

- AD rates are projected to keep increasing to 12.7 million individuals in the US by 2050.<sup>1</sup>
- New York State has the fourth largest elderly population in the country and its elderly population is

projected to account for 25% of the state population by 2025.<sup>3</sup>

- Leqembi is the first AD medication to be approved by the US FDA that has shown efficacy during a Phase 3 clinical trial, slowing cognitive decline by 27% within 18 months in adults with early-stage AD.<sup>5,8</sup>
- Research shows that precursors of AD development can occur years prior to the appearance of symptoms, but there are no specific programs for low-income individuals under 65 years that can help relieve the burden of the hefty annual cost of Leqembi at \$26,500.

### Implementation

The NYSDOH should immediately form outreach and public relations campaigns to raise awareness about the financial relief program. Leveraging existing support groups and resources within NYSDOH like the 24-hour Helpline can help garner interest for the program in providing essential subsidies and co-payment assistance. These efforts aim to ensure that potential beneficiaries are well-informed about the financial support available for those who may need the financial incentive to invest in the drug.

Furthermore, the NYSDOH and relevant state committees can help to promote and spread awareness for the program to the general public. Collaboration with advocacy groups, healthcare professionals, and patient organizations within NYS is critical to building a coalition of support

and trust behind the program. Ongoing advocacy efforts and fundraising among other organizations and investors will be essential in establishing this program with enough funding to help all those interested.

Currently, insurers are reluctant to include the drug in their plans due to the high cost of Leqembi, addressing concerns through collaborative discussions will similarly be essential. Highlighting the long-term benefits of preventing AD and emphasizing the positive impact on both individuals and the broader healthcare system will be key elements of the outreach strategy. This program will help prepare for the large increases in an older population in the long run, but also elevate quality of life for older populations. By following this comprehensive implementation plan, the NYSDOH can effectively roll out the financial relief program, bridging the affordability gap for Leqembi and advancing a preventive care model for AD in New York State.

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# Diversifying and Expanding the Rural, Perinatal Workforce through Subsidized Healthcare Education Programs

By Lilia Mitra, [lrn253@cornell.edu](mailto:lrn253@cornell.edu)

*United States maternal mortality and morbidity rates are rising, particularly in rural areas and among women of color: to improve healthcare quality and access, states should develop funded residency programs to promote a diverse group of future, rural, perinatal providers.*

## Background

Maternal mortality and morbidity are rising annually in the US, raising concerns.<sup>1</sup> Rates are significantly higher in rural areas and among Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities.<sup>2</sup> Black and Indigenous women are three and two times more likely, respectively, to die from a pregnancy-related cause than White women.<sup>3</sup> Clear gaps in access and quality of care for marginalized groups are driving the maternal healthcare crisis. From 2010 to 2021, 136 rural hospitals across the US closed, making accessing perinatal care increasingly difficult.<sup>4</sup> When hospitals close, providers leave the area, leaving a healthcare desert. By 2030, the supply of rural OB/GYNs will meet only half the demand.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, diversity in the current maternal health workforce does not represent American patients. Among licensed providers who work with pregnant women, less than 8% identify as Black or Indigenous.<sup>6</sup> Distrust in the healthcare system is high in rural areas, and the lack of cultural competency among providers leaves marginalized patients even less likely to seek care.<sup>7</sup> To increase maternal healthcare access and quality for rural communities, the

US must invest in building a diverse maternal health workforce committed to serving in healthcare deserts.

## Policy Idea

States with large, underserved rural populations should receive federal subsidies to create residency programs that bring students from in-state public residency programs, nursing schools, and licensed midwifery licensure programs to rural communities within the next five years. These states should mandate that public institutions implement these programs and offer significant financial assistance to students from diverse backgrounds who commit to working in underserved areas post-graduation. This policy provides direct exposure to the maternal health crisis, financial stability, and job opportunities as incentives for students to practice in the regions of the US that need it most.

## Policy Analysis

The Biden administration's White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis requested over \$20 million from Congress to grow and diversify the nation's perinatal workforce.<sup>8</sup> The Health Resources & Services Agency offers \$750,000

grants to help medical schools and health systems develop new rural residency programs. Since 2019, this initiative has awarded \$54 million, creating over 500 new residency positions.<sup>9</sup> Congress can amplify this impact by extending rural residency grants to other types of healthcare workers, including nurses and midwives, to allocate the requested funds. States can support maternal health goals by requiring public institutions to apply for rural residency grants and offering scholarships to providers from underrepresented backgrounds. Current efforts to subsidize healthcare education are failing to solve the provider shortage on their own. Institutions like New York University School of Medicine and the University of Rochester School of Nursing waive tuition for their students in the interest of removing barriers to entering the healthcare workforce. Although eliminating student loans makes lower-paying primary care and rural medicine positions more financially feasible, many job openings in these areas remain vacant as healthcare workers strive to work in more prestigious specialties.<sup>10</sup> Lack of exposure to rural community health and a culture that promotes specialty care are partially responsible for driving shortages.<sup>10</sup> Evidence suggests that

physicians and nurses from low-income backgrounds who graduate from public schools are more likely to pursue primary care and maternal health careers than their peers due to personal experience.<sup>10</sup> Considering these trends, low-income states are the ideal policy laboratory for expanding the maternal health workforce. Existing rural residency programs have shown early signs of success. The University of Colorado Medical School's rural track has sent 35% of its graduates to rural communities since its opening.<sup>11</sup> Maternal morbidity costs the US roughly \$21.9 billion annually, and high maternal mortality threatens the country's reputation as a leader in healthcare.<sup>12</sup> Efforts to expand the rural maternal health workforce and support a diverse group of future providers have the potential to save the US billions of dollars for a fraction of the cost.

### Highlights

- US maternal mortality and morbidity rates are significantly higher for Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous individuals in rural areas; perinatal care shortages drive disparities.<sup>13</sup>
- Rural residency programs, such as the University of Colorado Medical School's Rural Track, have effectively brought over 35% of their graduates to practice in their local underserved communities, closing rural coverage gaps.<sup>12</sup>
- The HRSA's Rural Residency Planning and Development Program has created nearly 40 new similar programs; including

nurse practitioners and midwives would increase effectiveness.<sup>9</sup>

- States can require their public institutions to apply for grants to create rural residency programs and offer scholarships to future providers from underrepresented backgrounds to expand and diversify their rural perinatal workforce.

### Implementation

State governments can start by establishing committees on rural maternal health. Louisiana, which has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the country, started the Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review (PAMR) Committee in 2010 to review causes of maternal death and make recommendations to providers around the state. To date, the committee's work has led to a 14% reduction in maternal deaths each year.<sup>14</sup> Other states with similarly high maternal mortality rates should follow suit with a focus on rural communities. These committees will help produce data that supports legislation on midwifery programs, scholarship funding, and grant applications. State legislatures should then pass a bill requiring their public institutions to start rural residency programs and earmarking scholarship funding for diverse providers. Doing so should be relatively easy; maternal health legislation has historically been bipartisan. For example, the Preventing Maternal Deaths Act of 2018, related to eliminating disparities in maternal health outcomes, was cosponsored by a large coalition of both Republicans and Democrats.<sup>15</sup> Congress will

have to pass legislation investing an additional \$20 million into the Rural Residency Planning and Development (RRPD) Program to fund changes at the state level partially. Once again, bipartisan support here is likely, and legislators have an incentive to vote positively to improve US healthcare standards.

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# Implementing an Interactive Screening Program to Expand Mental Health Services at Cornell University

By Shruti Nagpal, [sn528@cornell.edu](mailto:sn528@cornell.edu)

*Cornell University should adopt an Interactive Screening Program for its student population. An ISP program would enable students to receive mental health counseling through an anonymous platform, increasing comfort and engagement with on-campus mental health resources.*

## Background

Stress, anxiety, and depression are among the most prevalent mental health conditions negatively impacting students at Cornell University.<sup>1</sup> In April 2020, the university conducted a campus-wide Mental Health Review, which found that 42 percent of Cornell undergraduates were “unable to function for at least a week due to depression, stress or anxiety”—a nine percentage point increase from findings in 2015.<sup>2</sup> These negative feelings are believed to be influenced by various factors, including the rigorous workload, current political events, and the competitive academic environment at Cornell.<sup>3</sup> Many argue that the installation of “anti-suicide” nets under seven of the gorges’ bridges maintain a “depressing and constant reminder of suicide,” potentially exacerbating poor mental health and emphasizing its stressful culture among the student population.<sup>4</sup>

Since publishing the Mental Health Review in 2020, Cornell University has implemented several measures to improve student access to mental health support.<sup>5</sup> These include the Let’s Meditate program, which are weekly guided mindfulness meditation sessions hosted by Cornell Health, and Refresh:

Cornell’s Sleep Program, an 8-week initiative in the form of a self-paced online course empowering students to “achieve more restful nights” in ultimately improving their mental health. However, despite the various on-campus programs, a primary concern among students experiencing anxiety and depression is the lack of anonymity. According to a literature review on College Student Perspectives of Telemental Health, 25 percent of the undergraduate students involved in the review were interested in anonymous online chats as a form of counseling, primarily due to their greater comfort with its anonymity.<sup>6</sup>

Mental illness remains an ongoing and serious concern at Cornell University, requiring urgent attention. It is critical that Cornell University takes action to enhance utilization rates of existing mental health care services by exploring methods that provide students a higher degree of anonymity.

## Policy Idea

Cornell University should implement an Interactive Screening Program (ISP) for all students in an effort to expand campus-wide mental health resources. The ISP is an online program that would allow Cornell students to complete a 35-question, 10-minute-long

anonymous survey designed to screen for depression and stress. The program would enable students to engage with mental health professionals or counselors, allowing students to discuss their emotions and receive support without providing identifying information. Such a program would help eliminate concerns associated with the stigma of receiving mental health support. After each student submits a questionnaire, their response should be computer-analyzed and classified into one of four tiers: 1A, 1B, 2, and 3, organized by decreasing level of distress. This ranking system would help clinicians to formulate supportive, personalized responses to each student and provide appropriate care.

## Policy Analysis

ISPs are licensed for use in educational institutions by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and have demonstrated their effectiveness in a number of universities across the United States.

In 2019, the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services at West Chester University facilitated a study in which researchers implemented ISP and

recorded how undergraduate students utilized the system, specifically monitoring their usage during business hours compared to non-business hours.<sup>7</sup> While the study found that there was no significant difference in ISP utilization based on time of day or week, demonstrating that students did not particularly take advantage of the after-hours support, it also found that about half of the students used the program during a time when they could have easily accessed counseling center for an in-person appointment.<sup>7</sup> This finding speaks to the appeal and comfortable nature of an anonymous, online portal where students can receive brief clinical feedback and support.

US medical schools have also shown similar benefits from these programs. A recent study of ISP usage among six medical schools found that utilization rates were the highest for individuals classified in Tier 1A, or highest distress. 98% of participants (including students, residents, and faculty physicians) were classified as having high or moderate distress, demonstrating high utilization rates for individuals with a greater need for mental health support.<sup>8</sup> In terms of student satisfaction, the study also found that individuals benefited from the personal connection they were able to make with counselors through ISP without the stress of identifying themselves.

### Highlights

- In April 2020, Cornell University conducted a campus-wide Mental Health Review, which found that 42 percent of Cornell undergraduates were

“unable to function for at least a week due to depression, stress or anxiety.”<sup>2</sup>

- According to a literature review on College Student Perspectives of Telemental Health, 25 percent of the undergraduate students involved in the review were interested in anonymous online chats as a form of counseling, primarily due to their greater comfort with its anonymity.<sup>6</sup>
- Cornell University should implement an ISP for all students in an effort to expand campus-wide mental health resources, allowing students to discuss their emotions with counselors and receive support without providing identifying information.
- A study at West Chester University, where ISP is currently implemented, found that about half of the students used the program during a time when they could have easily accessed the counseling center for an in-person appointment, suggesting the appeal of an anonymous, online portal where students can receive brief clinical feedback and support.<sup>7</sup>

### Implementation

To implement ISP at Cornell University, one of the primary steps should be to contact Cornell Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) within Cornell Health, the primary division that provides counseling and therapy sessions for Cornell students. This division does not currently offer

anonymous counseling services. A conversation presenting the benefits and utilization of ISP at West Chester University and a number of medical schools may help CAPS counselors and staff consider implementing such a program.

The AFSP should also be contacted in moving further toward implementing ISP. AFSP founded ISP, containing an interest form on their website for universities to complete if they are interested in adopting the program on their campus. Upon reviewing the interest form responses, AFSP ensures that there is a need for ISP at the university and can help guide the implementation process.

To gain and mobilize support for this idea, it may be beneficial to conduct a campus-wide survey to gauge interest for ISP at Cornell University. From there, an activist group can be formed with students who are interested in implementing ISP. These students can assemble to collect more data on the benefits of the program as necessary and encourage CAPS to expand its resources to contain ISP. These students will also need to interact with Cornell University executives, including President Martha Pollack and Vice President Ryan Lombardi, to ensure the approval and implementation of ISP.

Some backlash from this proposal may result from the fact that data on mental health illness prevalence among Cornell students has not been collected since 2020. Since there has been no recent data collection, from 2020 to 2023, the prevalence of mental health illness among students could have decreased, as well as the percent of students who feel that their academic performance has been



impacted by their mental health condition. To address this concern, it is ideal to urge the university to survey students for another mental health review to collect updated statistics. If the percentage of students reporting that their academic performance has been impacted by their mental health is not significantly different than it was in 2020, despite CAPS's recent programs and interventions, then it would be beneficial to implement ISP in an attempt to better reach students struggling with mental health conditions.

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# Increasing Capitated Payment in New York State

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*Currently, healthcare costs in the US are exorbitant and continue to increase without the quality or outcomes to justify these expenditures. Transitioning to a capitated system will help achieve the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim: simultaneously improving the population's health, elevating care experience, and lowering per capita costs.*

## Background

American healthcare costs are higher than any other developed nation, yet health outcomes are worse due to the current high utilization of the fee-for-service (FFS) model.<sup>1</sup> This issue was especially apparent during the pandemic, as hospitals hemorrhaged money when elective surgeries were suspended, and physicians suddenly lost their constant patient flow.<sup>2</sup> Now is the time for this change. Even after the pandemic, the current model is still wasteful, with half of healthcare delivery waste being avoidable.<sup>3</sup> FFS models only retain 5 to 9% of new revenues for their healthcare organization's bottom line.<sup>3</sup> From both the provider and patient perspectives, the American healthcare system's current prevalent health payment model, which lacks patient-centered care, creates inefficiencies in the system with poor health outcomes. For too long, high-cost, low-quality care has allowed its inefficiencies to plague American patients with poor health outcomes, especially in comparison to international peers.<sup>1</sup> It is time to achieve the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim: simultaneously improving the population's health, elevating care experience, and lowering per capita costs.<sup>4</sup>

## Policy Idea

Over the course of the next decade, New York State should incentivize public and private insurance plans to utilize capitation. New York State should supplement transitional stipends to participating agencies if done within the next five years. To meet this demand for value, New York health systems should focus on methods to achieve the Triple Aim, such as putting Community Benefit dollars toward creating New York Health Homes for all patients, not just Medicaid Beneficiaries.

## Policy Analysis

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid, the nation's largest insurer, already utilizes capitation, demonstrating clear cost savings and improved health benefits. Their Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation uses capitation as the payment method for healthcare providers. As private health insurers typically follow Medicare's suit, this increased emphasis on capitation would improve the American healthcare system's quality, efficiency, and equity. NYS can set an example for other states to follow suit. This capitation payment plan creates Accountable Care Organizations, which assume responsibility for their designated patient population, promoting cost-efficient and high-quality healthcare delivery that can ensure savings.

The healthcare system places additional value on the population's health, as proactive healthcare measures prevent costly reactionary emergency visits. As a result of the collaborative opportunities created by capitation models, the Triple Aim is achieved, advancing health justice for all.<sup>5</sup> While FFS models only retain 5 to 9% of new revenues for their healthcare organizations' bottom lines, capitated payment plans boost this share to 50 to 100%.<sup>3</sup> Further, Intermountain Health saved \$688 million by reducing waste while maintaining the highest bond ratings among nonprofit healthcare providers.<sup>3</sup> In fact, studies have proven that healthcare organizations' finances improved from just 23% to 29% of their payments coming from the capitation payment model.<sup>3</sup> NYS Medicaid models for value-based care like Health Homes have resulted in \$8.76 million in cost savings with a 37.8% reduction in hospitalizations, 37% reduction in preventable readmissions, 17.2% reduction in potentially preventable emergency department visits, and improved rates for many preventative screenings.<sup>6</sup> Kaiser Permanente, one of the nation's top care centers, fully uses capitation as well.<sup>7</sup>

## Highlights

- American healthcare costs are higher than any developed nation, yet with worse health outcomes due to the current overutilization of the FFS model, which has proven flawed before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>2</sup>
- The Center for Medicare and Medicaid, the nation's largest insurer, already utilizes capitation, demonstrating clear cost savings and improved health benefits. As private health insurers typically follow Medicare's suit, this increased emphasis on capitation would transform the American healthcare system in terms of quality, efficiency, and equity.<sup>3</sup>
- This capitation payment plan creates Accountable Care Organizations, which assume responsibility for their designated patient population, promoting cost-efficient and high-quality healthcare delivery that can ensure savings.<sup>3</sup>
- NYS Medicaid models for value-based care, like Health Homes, have resulted in \$8.76 million in cost savings with a 37.8% reduction in hospitalizations, 37% reduction in preventable readmissions, 17.2% reduction in potentially preventable emergency department visits, and

improved rates for many preventative screenings.<sup>6</sup>

## Implementation

For implementation, legislative action from the New York State Governor would be necessary. With the resources of New York State at the disposal of the policy, insurers and health systems would be encouraged and eventually forced to adopt the capitation model within the timeframe. However, in order to get governor support, strong public support for the program is critical. Toward that end, educating the public on the current political climate regarding the FFS model paired with findings on the current success of the capitated models across the nation would be beneficial in gaining such widespread support. Targeting specific voting populations is particularly key. Nevertheless, the policy would probably face opposition from many Republican constituents; however, considering the policy focuses on New York State, that should not be a large issue, as NYS is a predominantly Democratic state. While some large health systems may be opposed to the change in payment models, clear statistics prove that this switch will not only help Americans reduce exorbitant costs and increase quality of care but also help providers avoid further burnout and decreased satisfaction, assuaging concerns. Proper implementation of this model will result in increased efficiency and enhanced return on

investment. With capitated payments, everyone can benefit.

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