

REGIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

JUNE 2020



Introduction

New England faces a crisis of mass unemployment. The coronavirus pandemic has increased joblessness to rates unseen since the Great Depression. Vast numbers of unemployed people across the region are struggling to meet basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare. Many people are surviving almost entirely on unemployment insurance, and underemployed workers and undocumented families are often unable to collect unemployment benefits. Many of the jobs that have been lost during the pandemic are unlikely to return soon. Mass unemployment is not the only crisis we face. Climate change already poses severe threats to New England residents including heat waves, hurricanes, droughts, and forest fires. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic poses a deadly, ongoing threat to New England residents. These three crises – mass unemployment, climate change, and the coronavirus pandemic – disproportionately harm frontline and vulnerable communities including Indigenous peoples, Black people, communities of color, migrant communities, the poor, women, the elderly, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the young, and people with disabilities.

In addition to mass unemployment, climate change, and the pandemic, New England faces a fourth crisis: racial injustice. Systemic racism is present throughout New England society, involving everything from employment discrimination to systematic police violence.

We are the Renew New England Alliance, a new and growing coalition of more than fifty leading labor unions, racial justice organizations, frontline communities, and environmental advocates. We have come together to tackle these four overlapping crises. The core of our plan to address mass unemployment, the pandemic, climate change, and racial injustice is a **Jobs Guarantee**, which will ensure that everyone who wants a job will have one. Ultimately, to address these national crises, the Jobs Guarantee must be backed by the federal government and implemented nationwide. But states must lead the way. New England states will launch the Jobs Guarantee by supporting local, small businesses and creating new public employment initiatives designed to modernize our region's infrastructure and ensure that everyone's **basic needs** are met in the areas of (1) housing, (2) healthcare, (3) food, (4) energy, (5) transportation, and (6) clean air and water. Our coalition will conduct grassroots organizing and public education across New England, advocating for the implementation of a regionwide Jobs Guarantee, starting immediately with shovel-ready projects in all six states.

The jobs we create will meet or exceed the prevailing wage, paying no less than \$15 per hour. Workers will enjoy strong union protections, collective bargaining rights, and a full range of robust benefits including paid sick leave, workplace safety standards, and excellent health insurance. We will fully fund union-led programs to equip workers with the skills necessary for the new jobs that we create. Workers will be paid to participate in these programs, which will include "earn while you learn" apprenticeships. We will ensure that workers currently in the fossil fuel industry will not face unemployment, but will instead receive new, well-compensated, dignified jobs. Regional coordination is the key to protecting workers' rights and preventing capital from migrating to neighboring New England states with lower prevailing wages, sparser union densities, and weaker workplace safety standards. We will implement strong anti-discrimination measures to ensure that communities of color are well-represented in the public employment workforce.

The following policy platform discusses how our Jobs Guarantee, along with other programs, will ensure that these six basic needs are met for everyone in New England. This document then examines how the New England states can collectively finance our regional Jobs Guarantee.

Policy Framework

Housing is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee program will build new, carbon-neutral, climate-resilient affordable housing units; repair existing units; and install green retrofits. Frontline and vulnerable communities will play a key role in identifying where these new units of affordable housing will be located.

Additional Policies: Every New England state will enact rent stabilization, anti-displacement, and anti-discrimination laws.

Healthcare is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee program will build community health centers and expand public education programs to train and certify healthcare workers. We will locate these health centers in an equitable way, ensuring that everyone receives the benefits of free medical care, including people living in areas – such as Black and Brown communities, poor communities, and rural communities – that frequently lack hospitals and clinics.

Additional Policy: New England states will collaborate to provide universal health insurance through a unified regional program.

Food is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee program will expand support for small, local farmers in New England; build a larger network of small, local farms throughout the region; and restore natural ecosystems.

Additional Policy: Every New England state will dramatically expand food assistance programs.

Energy is a basic need and we will guarantee zero-carbon energy to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee program will install solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage devices in order to ensure 100% zero-carbon electricity consumption for the entire region by 2030.

Additional Policies: Every New England state will ensure that all buildings use entirely zero-carbon energy by 2040, and will phase out fossil fuel infrastructure.

Transportation is a basic need and we will guarantee zero-carbon transportation to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee program will build a free, high-speed public transit system in order to achieve regionwide zero-carbon transportation by 2040. Frontline and vulnerable communities will play a key role in identifying where new transit routes will be located.

Additional Policy: Every New England state will offer financial support for purchasing electric vehicles, targeted towards low-income, rural, and working-class populations.

Clean Air and Water are basic needs and we will guarantee them to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee program will create a pollution cleanup task force. Black and Brown communities and poor communities – into which much of our region’s pollution has been channeled – will play a key role in identifying areas to be cleaned up.

Additional Policies: Every New England state will protect Indigenous land sovereignty, replace lead pipes, and strengthen and enforce clean air and water standards.

Financing

We will fund our Jobs Guarantee from six sources.

First, we will ramp up pressure on the federal government to expand stimulus funding for states and municipalities. We will ensure that this money is not directed towards corporate bailouts or regressive tax cuts for the wealthy. Instead, stimulus dollars will be used to fund our Jobs Guarantee to rebuild New England in an equitable and ecologically sustainable way. Furthermore, by beginning to implement our Jobs Guarantee, we will demonstrate that it is an effective way of tackling mass joblessness, building public pressure on the federal government to fund a nationwide public employment program.

Second, we will ensure that the wealthiest New England residents pay their fair share in taxes. They have received decades of tax cuts at the federal, state, and municipal levels. In every New England state except Vermont, the lowest-earning 20% pay a greater proportion of their income in state and local taxes than the highest-earning 1%.ⁱ We will ensure that the richest 1% pay their fair share.

Third, each New England state will establish a public green bank. These banks will manage a portion of the capital controlled by states instead of hiring giant Wall Street investment banks to handle this money. These green banks will invest in local Jobs Guarantee projects that will boost our regional economy and create a just transition to zero-carbon energy. These banks will also attract private capital. The Connecticut Green Bank, for example, attracted \$900 million in private investment for clean energy projects using only \$175 million of public money as leverage, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 3.7 million tons and creating over 5,000 green jobs.ⁱⁱ

Fourth, states can issue bonds to immediately generate funds for shovel-ready projects that create jobs and strengthen community resilience. New England states can use the Municipal Liquidity Facility, a new program created by the Federal Reserve in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which provides loans to states by purchasing large quantities of their bonds.ⁱⁱⁱ The six New England states would, collectively, be eligible for \$15.6 billion in loans through the Municipal Liquidity Facility.^{iv}

Fifth, the Jobs Guarantee will dramatically increase local economic activity which will, in turn, raise cumulative tax revenues. Our policies will develop local industries involved in installing solar panels, wind turbines, and energy-efficient home appliances; expanding agriculture; and constructing new homes, community health centers, and railways. Our policies will also reduce the amount of wealth flowing out of our region. In New England, we extract none of the fossil fuels that we use, grow only a small fraction of the food that we consume, and manufacture few of the cars that we buy. Our regional economy is like a leaky bucket, with much of the money we spend on energy, food, and transportation flowing to giant corporations outside of New England. Our Jobs Guarantee will plug these leaks by developing local agriculture to reduce our dependence on imported food, building public transit to reduce our dependence on imported cars, and expanding renewable energy to reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Sixth, we will end mass incarceration, over-policing, and the militarization of law enforcement. These policies have devastated vulnerable communities across New England, particularly Black and Brown communities. Mass incarceration and over-policing are deeply racist and unjust programs, which systematically fail to make society safer, to rehabilitate offenders, or to address the structural conditions that foster crime. These policies also cost a great deal of money every year, much of it spent on arresting, prosecuting, and incarcerating nonviolent offenders and monitoring them through probation, parole, and pretrial supervision.^v We will redirect this money towards Jobs Guarantee projects that will reinvest in our region's prosperity and help to reconstruct communities that have been harmed by our unjust law enforcement system.

Citations

ⁱ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, “Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States” (Oct. 2018), *available at* <https://itep.org/wp-content/uploads/whopays-ITEP-2018.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Matt Pilon, “Financially Wounded, Pioneering CT Green Bank has a Path Forward” (Jan. 2018), *available at* <https://www.hartfordbusiness.com/article/financially-wounded-pioneering-ct-green-bank-has-a-path-forward>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Federal Reserve Bank of the United States, “Municipal Liquidity Facility” (Jun. 2020), *available at* <https://www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/muni.htm>.

^{iv} Federal Reserve Bank of New York, “Municipal Facility Limit Per State” (May 2020), *available at* <https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/markets/municipal-liquidity-facility-eligible-issuers>.

^v Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, “Following the Money of Mass Incarceration” (Jan. 2017), *available at* <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html>.