



2021

ARIZONA RESILIENT

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
DOUG DUCEY



My administration's focus over the past year has been the pandemic. We've attempted at every turn, to prioritize public health, protect the health of our health care system, and of course protect livelihoods. It hasn't been easy, and even with multiple vaccines miraculously now being administered, the impacts of the pandemic are going to be felt throughout our state and country for many months and years to come. As policymakers, we will be called upon to remedy many of these impacts, and it will be our responsibility to work on them together.

When it comes to education, our kids have a lot of catching up to do. The pandemic has not been easy on our K-12 system, and as a result, our kids have suffered greatly. I have grave concerns over the widening of the achievement gap and it will be imperative that we focus all of our resources on bringing kids up to grade level and ensuring we don't allow them to fall further behind.

Our businesses have been one of the many victims of the pandemic. I am hopeful we can get to work on an aggressive package that will help our small businesses and overall economy recover quickly, and that will ensure that all Arizona families who have been hit hard by the pandemic, are given much-needed relief.

Enclosed are more details on these programs and more, including telemedicine, liability protections, improving the health of our forests, and needed improvements to our criminal justice system.

With the vaccine now in our communities, there is hope on the horizon in 2021.

Arizonans have proven they are resilient, and that the state of our state is indeed strong. They are relying on policymakers to ensure that Arizona remains a state full of opportunity for all.


Douglas A. Ducey
Governor of Arizona

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Vaccine Rollout

The vaccine rollout is our State's top priority. If 2020 was the year of the virus, 2021 will be the year of the vaccine. The most recent federal COVID-19 relief bill included \$8.75 billion to support vaccine distribution, of which \$4.5 billion will be distributed to state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments.

Arizona will use its share of this vaccine funding to support and increase mass vaccination sites and to distribute vaccines across the state to an increasing number of smaller community sites, including local pharmacies and doctors offices, as supply permits. **The State will work to ensure that every Arizonan who wants a vaccine can get one.**

The vaccine provides a way out of the pandemic, but only if enough people are actually vaccinated. The State will continue to support and fund the vaccination effort, and we encourage all Arizonans to roll up their sleeves and step up to be vaccinated when it is their turn.

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Everyone needs this vaccine. And the sooner we all receive it, the more quickly we can get on with life as it should be.”

Governor Doug Ducey

Telemedicine

During the pandemic, telemedicine became more important than ever, not only for COVID-19, but for everyday health needs. Our rural areas, in particular, benefited greatly from individuals not having to travel to metropolitan areas in order to get basic health needs met. One of the largest areas of utilization of telemedicine was behavioral health as needs in this area have increased during the pandemic related to anxiety and isolation.

This legislative session, we should focus on permanently expanding these opportunities for all Arizonans. People have come to rely on the fact that they can see their doctors when necessary without the need to leave their own home. We trust that our doctors and patients can manage their relationships without the government and insurance companies telling them which method is more preferable.

The Legislature should also seek to expand this allowance so that doctors outside of our state may provide telehealth to patients in Arizona. A person who is visiting family here or spends the winter here, should be able to reach their doctor in their home state by telemedicine. A family in Mohave County who utilizes a hospital in Las Vegas, Nevada should be able to get follow up care via telemedicine. Today, someone who has the means to travel to a consultation with a specialist in another state can do so. Specialty doctors should not only be accessible via an expensive flight and hotel stay. If a specialty provider is willing to do a consult via telehealth, Arizona patients should have easy access to those services without unnecessary travel expenses and Arizona is going to lead the way on this. If it's safe and it works during a pandemic, we should embrace it when we're not in an emergency as well.

Real Improvement: A Story

The life-changing benefits that telemedicine can have on Arizona families is significant. The Gamez family has always put their daughter's health care first. Their daughter has a serious health condition and under the old system, their family had to travel from Yuma to Phoenix up to four days a week for their daughter's treatment at Phoenix Children's Hospital (PCH). With the flexibility provided via the Governor's Executive Order, the Gamez family is now able to get the vast majority of their daughter's health needs met in Yuma via televisits with her PCH doctors and only has to make the 6-hour round trip to Phoenix once a month. This is real improvement for real people and we need more of it.

Broadband

High-speed internet is essential for accelerating economic development, enhancing education, expanding access to health care, improving public safety, and modernizing government services. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding broadband services is more important than ever before.

To date, we have worked collaboratively with the Legislature and private broadband providers to establish a statewide broadband office within the Arizona Commerce Authority to coordinate broadband planning, reduce regulatory hurdles for broadband infrastructure development at the Arizona State Land Department, and award \$3 million in grants to accelerate critical broadband projects in underserved rural and tribal locations across Arizona. Projects include more than 15 miles of fiber through the Navajo Nation to Page, Arizona, and expanded connectivity to the home for more than 33,000 rural residents in Mohave County.

Broadband

In June 2020, we announced a major investment of federal CARES Act funding to expand “middle-mile” broadband infrastructure and reduce the cost to connect rural Arizonans who need it most. The investment is in response to the thousands of Arizona students who transitioned to online learning. The plan includes \$40 million to install broadband conduit and fiber on Interstate-17 (I-17) that connects Phoenix to Flagstaff, and on Interstate-19 (I-19) from Tucson to Nogales. This collaborative effort between the State and the three state universities is a model that holds great promise for advancing digital access in Arizona.

There's still more to do. **We should open the rights of way along our state highways to help private broadband companies find cost-effective routes to our underserved rural communities. And we need to capitalize on the momentum to expand and enhance broadband connectivity throughout the state with another investment in rural broadband grants.**

Rural broadband makes Arizona more connected, competitive, and resilient than ever before.

COVID-19 Liability Protection

The pandemic has caused a lot of uncertainty for the business, education and health care communities. While they adapt and make decisions about how to protect their employees, customers, students and patients, they have a real concern about facing frivolous lawsuits related to the pandemic.

This pandemic has been unprecedented and for those schools, hospitals and other businesses who have acted in good faith and implemented public health guidelines and mitigation efforts, they should be offered a safe harbor from frivolous litigation. They've overcome extraordinary challenges, quickly and innovatively implemented safety protocols, and we should seek to provide some stability through a comprehensive liability package that will establish clear rules of the road.

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Before COVID, we had an achievement gap in our schools. And it's only gotten worse. It's a problem detailed in a report just last week from one of the state's leading business organizations – with data showing the gap in student achievement often falls squarely down economic and racial lines.

Governor Doug Ducey

Closing the Achievement Gap

Unfortunately, many schools across the state made the difficult decision to go virtual for extended periods of time over the last year. Thankfully, many of our schools adapted quickly and effectively to remote learning, but unfortunately many students are still falling behind. We should be gravely concerned about the lack of learning and the widening of our achievement gap.

Large K-12 investments should be made with a keen focus on closing the achievement gap and targeting our lowest income learners to ensure that we are not letting them fall further and further behind.

Literacy

A key part of closing the achievement gap will be to have a laser focus on 3rd grade literacy. Arizona should be leading the nation in gains on reading assessments. We know what tools work and how to deploy them.

The Executive Budget will fund these tools, starting with an investment to deploy literacy coaches to the lowest-performing Pre-Kindergarten through 3rd grade schools and equip them with intensive technical assistance to support, improve, and sustain effective teaching and literacy practices.

It also funds a statewide kindergarten entry evaluation to measure where our students are starting out at - an important tool already used in 34 other states and Washington D.C. This simple, quick evaluation will ensure resources can be strategically targeted to the kids and schools that need them the most.

School Choice

With the flexibility of our school choice system in Arizona, many parents were able to take advantage of other options when their school wasn't providing what they needed for their specific circumstances during the pandemic. We are very proud of this system, as it empowers parents to make the best decisions for their children. There is always more work we can do to ensure that choices are more attainable to all families, especially our lower-income families across our state.

We should start with thinking outside the box to remove one of the greatest barriers to accessing school choice - transportation. After all, a choice is only a choice if you can get there, and unfortunately, those with the greatest hurdles to getting there are in our low income neighborhoods. **The Executive Budget backs this up, with a commitment to “driving equity” by awarding grants to schools that are willing to be innovative and increase access for underserved kids.**

The way we do open enrollment at school districts across the State is overdue for reform. It's time to make it truly open for all. Too often, only those parents who are “in the know” about the various options and procedures to take advantage of this choice for their children are able to. **We are going to invest in getting the word out to more families, and end exclusionary policies like unreasonably short enrollment windows that simply don't work for busy parents.**

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By necessity during this emergency, many parents have been more engaged than ever in the daily education of their children. Quite a few have found temporary educational options they want to make permanent. It's their right. Public policy should keep pace, and empower them to make that choice.

Governor Doug Ducey



New Opportunities: A Story

Many parents throughout Arizona sought new options for their kids during the pandemic that would better fit their needs. For example, due to COVID-19, Fiona Johnson was faced with needing a new school with a special-needs virtual option for her three boys, River (2nd grade), Bodhi (4th grade) and Indy (Kindergarten). All three boys are on the autism spectrum and Fiona has struggled to find a public school that meets all their needs. Her family chose Arizona Autism Charter School this past fall and have never been so impressed with teachers, who even over the screen understand her boys' individual needs and see their unique gifts. The boys meet with their virtual teachers to receive small group and one-on-one instruction and have been equipped with learning materials and hands-on STEM kits with the help of Innovation Grant funds and the Intel First Book initiative. While Fiona has opted for Arizona Autism Charter School's virtual option, she is excited the school offers an onsite option, and as COVID-19 numbers go down, plans to bring her boys to in-person school in the upcoming spring semester. This opportunity would not be possible without the flexibility of Arizona's school choice system, and we are grateful that Fiona and her sons have found a school that fits their family's needs.

Healthy Forest Initiative

A prolonged drought combined with population growth and poorly managed federal lands have resulted in wildfires causing devastating property losses and damage to state and private lands. This year, we are proposing a significant shift in the funding for wildfire suppression and a major initiative to reduce wildfire risks by investing in healthy forests.

Central to this proposal is an increase in funding for programs to reduce the threat of wildfires in Arizona, with a focus on removing the overgrown vegetation creating high fire risk in the wildland-urban interface. **The State will implement a five-fold increase, to over 20,000 acres per year, in the amount of this land treated through in-house capacity and partner grants.** While still working alongside Federal partners to reduce wildfire risk on Federal lands, including through new partnerships enabled by proposed statutory changes, this critical public safety initiative reflects a shift in strategy to one where the State takes a much larger role in reducing wildfire risk to our communities and their assets.

Emphasis on Decreasing Recidivism

In order to accomplish this substantial increase for treating Arizona's fire-prone lands we are proposing to build on the successes of inmate wildland firefighting crews. The results of the existing program to **fight** fires have been significant, and will be expanded into a new program to **prevent** fires. The success stories are inspiring.

While the State will benefit greatly from allowing more inmates the opportunity to contribute to this critical public safety initiative of managing the health of our forests, inmates participating in this program will benefit from the opportunity to learn skills that open up new employment opportunities upon leaving prison, even introducing them to a potential network of employers while still incarcerated. Reducing recidivism makes our communities safer, reduces government expenses, and benefits the individual and their loved ones for a lifetime. The hard and soft skills learned in recidivism-reducing programs are critical for long-term employment and success of participants. The idea of reducing recidivism through educational and vocational programs is not new to Arizona, but the size of this program is going to open up new programming opportunities to substantially more eligible individuals. Approximately 720 additional inmates will benefit from this expansion, increased from 240 in the program today. With the expansion of this initiative, there will be many more inspiring stories.

Redemption: A Story

A success story that illustrates the positive impact of the current program is that of Krista Countryman. After going to prison for a third time, Krista found redemption in joining Perryville's inmate fire crew. It brought her life meaning and put her on the path of a career in order to provide for herself and her daughter once she served her sentence. Krista is just one of the many stories of former inmates in Arizona who've had their lives transformed and found purpose by providing this important service for our state. We are encouraged by Krista's journey and are looking forward to offering this opportunity to an additional 720 Arizonans.

Public & Community Safety

When it comes to law enforcement, there should be investments that protect both the community and our law enforcement professionals. Things such as body cameras on every trooper and modernized training statewide, to address the issues our cops face in the field today.

Law enforcement having reliable equipment and infrastructure is critical to serving and protecting our communities. **The Arizona Department of Public Safety is one of the only law enforcement entities who do not already have agency wide body-worn cameras on troopers. It's time that we fix that and ensure our troopers have the tools they need to do their job safely.** Part of this critical infrastructure is a reliable communications system. We have again proposed a solution, providing much-needed updates to the communication equipment and infrastructure that serves not only our troopers, but law enforcement and other agencies across the state so that all Arizonans are safer and better served.

Our communities rely on the brave public safety professionals showing up to work every day to protect Arizonans. They cannot effectively execute their mission without the trust of all facets of the community they serve. To start to rebuild trust that has been eroded with some communities, this administration has engaged in conversations with law enforcement professionals and community leaders across the state. We have had productive conversations on best practices to continue to improve the relationship and attempt to regain trust. In addition, **we have formed community advisory panels at the Arizona Department of Public Safety.** These advisory panels have been a platform for open and honest dialogue and have provided participants with new perspective and insight.

Public & Community Safety

The Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training (AZPOST) Board has been working over the last year to thoroughly review, update, and improve the training requirements for peace officers in Arizona. AZPOST has incorporated subject matter experts and taken the unprecedented step to include community members in the review and development of the statewide required training curriculums. In addition to the training academy curriculums, AZPOST has reviewed and updated programs for officers in leadership and for ongoing training requirements. We should support these efforts and ensure that they are successful and comprehensive.

We also need to ensure that AZPOST Board Members accurately reflect the diverse Arizona population our law enforcement is charged with protecting. **Adding public seats on this board to reflect the community will ensure better representation of minority communities.**

There is still more to do. Mental health issues are at the forefront of our agenda. Law enforcement officers are commonly called on to respond to mental health incidents, and need to be provided the proper training and tools to effectively respond to those calls. Several communities have small programs to address these calls, and we should expand on what is already working to best serve the entire state. It is also important to make sure that our state's law enforcement professionals have access to mental health services when needed.

As we continue to engage in these conversations, we know there will be more action items and work to be done. No system is perfect and we should always seek continuous improvement.

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I propose, in this session, we work together to reform and lower taxes and preserve Arizona’s good name as a responsible, competitive state. On tax reform, let’s think big.”

Governor Doug Ducey

Tax Reform

Arizonans have had to weather an unprecedented storm over the last year. While our economy is in much better shape than most other states across the country, Arizonans and their businesses and families have still suffered greatly. **For their sake, we need to pass significant tax reform.**

Small businesses, in particular, have been hit hard. As they recover, we should focus on what we can do to alleviate the strain they will face. And in doing so, we can ensure that Arizona maintains its competitive edge in attracting businesses to our state that we have enjoyed for many years.

In 2019, Arizona achieved the most significant tax reform of the last 30 years – making our tax code simpler, flatter and more fair. It was recognized by economists nationally as one of the best approaches to tax conformity in the country. Governor Ducey ran in 2014 and was reelected in 2018 on a promise to reduce income taxes and allow taxpayers to keep more of their hard-earned money. **Now we are calling for lawmakers to go further, chipping away at the state income tax in a way that keeps Arizona competitive with the rest of the country. Lawmakers should think big – finding ways to reform and restructure our entire tax code to the benefit of hardworking taxpayers.**

Water Innovation

As Arizonans know well, water is the most essential resource for sustaining life on our planet. Leaders worldwide understand the importance of preserving it for generations to come and Arizona is at the forefront of these global efforts, advancing innovative water technologies and conservation methods to support our state's tremendous growth and success.

Arizona's long history of water resource management practices goes back centuries, beginning with the canal system designed by the native Hohokam that is still used to carry water to the arid regions of the state. The benefits of this expertise are evident today— while our state's population has grown steadily over the years, water use remains essentially the same as it was more than half a century ago. In fact, some Arizona residents are using less water— per capita residential gallons of water used per day have fallen roughly 30% over the last 20 years.

As a state, we will continue to lead in forward-looking inclusive water policy development and look for new opportunities to innovate when it comes to the delivery of water. The Governor's Water Innovation Augmentation and Conservation Council will keep up its work on important efforts for next-generation issues like desalination and other major augmentation possibilities. Our work in this area will never be finished.

Modernized Gaming Compact

The State has been negotiating with the tribes on a modernized gaming compact. The current compacts are set to expire over the next couple of years. The re-negotiated compact is intended to maintain the current culture of gaming in the state, allow for limited, well-regulated gaming while allowing for modernization, and increase revenue to the tribes and to the State. **In order to fulfill the compacts, the State negotiated policies that will need legislative authorization in order to add sports betting, fantasy sports and keno, which again will be limited and well-regulated.** The modernized compact will allow for growth to the overall gaming profile consistent with the growth the State has seen over the last 20 years, while allowing things like mobile devices to be used as part of the gaming experience moving forward.



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