A small portion of adults (16 years and older) in Arlington County live in poverty. Poverty is defined as earning less than the Federal Poverty Level, which varies based on household size and composition. In 2021, the Federal Poverty Level for a single adult was $12,880, and for a family of four, it was $26,500. These levels are set by the U.S. Census Bureau and reflect the minimum income needed to meet basic household expenses such as housing, food, utilities, child care, transportation, and savings for emergencies. The Household Survival Budget is a more comprehensive measure of living costs and includes necessities like housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan. It does not include savings for emergencies or future goals like college or retirement. In 2021, household costs in every county in Virginia were well above the Federal Poverty Level. The Household Survival Budget reflects the minimum cost to live and work in the modern economy and includes housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan. Households below the ALICE Threshold — ALICE households plus those in poverty — can’t afford the Household Survival Budget. As circumstances change, households may find themselves below or above the ALICE Threshold at different times. While wages fail to keep pace with the rising cost of household essentials (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and taxes), house prices in Arlington County have continued to increase, further constraining ALICE households.

The ALICE database is regularly collected and updated to provide the most current and reliable data to policymakers. ALICE data is reported at the county level, allowing for a more detailed analysis of economic conditions within specific areas compared to statewide averages. Counties are the core geography for ALICE data: They reveal variations often masked by statewide averages, and the data is constrained, meaning it is limited to households who are unemployed and a large number were working in low-wage jobs, and in Arlington County, many of these jobs were in the retail and hospitality industries. As a result, the data does not include earnings for everyone who was employed. In 2021, the number of households below the ALICE Threshold decreased to 11,249 households, down 17% from 2019. Factors that may have contributed to this decline include unprecedented public assistance through pandemic relief measures. In 2019, 20% (state average 28%) of households were below the ALICE Threshold. However, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the number of households below the ALICE Threshold increased to 13,728 households, or 25% of households, up from 20% in 2019.

The ALICE database is designed to provide policymakers with comprehensive data to make informed decisions. The database includes a variety of metrics such as labor force participation rate, median household income, population, workforce, and economic indicators. These data points are crucial for understanding the economic landscape of Arlington County and informing policy decisions.

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