THE STATE OF ALICE IN The National Capital Area

2025 Update on Financial Hardship

UNITED FOR ALICE

UNITED WAY of the National Capital Area

INTRODUCING ALICE®

ALICE Households

In 2023, based on the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), 8% of households in the National Capital Area were defined as being in poverty. Yet this measure failed to account for an additional 25% of households in the region – more than three times as many – that were also experiencing financial hardship. These households are **ALICE**: **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed – earning above the FPL, but not enough to afford basic expenses in the county where they live.

Between ALICE households and households living in poverty, **an estimated 33% of households in the National Capital Area were below the ALICE Threshold in 2023.** Households below the Threshold are forced to make impossible choices – like deciding whether to pay for utilities or a car repair, whether to buy food or fill a prescription.

Households below the ALICE Threshold are in every state and county across the U.S. and represent all demographic groups. Workers below the ALICE Threshold often perform the jobs that keep our economy functioning smoothly – they are childcare providers, food service workers, cashiers, personal care aides, delivery drivers, and more. Their stories capture the systemic and structural barriers to financial stability, and the struggles and resilience of families experiencing financial hardship.

ALICE Measures

The ALICE measures were developed by United For ALICE to answer the pressing need for a more accurate picture of financial hardship. The FPL is an outdated instrument that does not consider the wide variation in cost of living by location (except for a slightly higher state-level FPL for Alaska and Hawai'i). As a result, official measures based on the FPL sharply underestimate the true extent of financial hardship in the U.S. And because the FPL is the basis for defining eligibility for many types of public assistance, ALICE households often do not qualify.

Two pillars of the ALICE measures are household costs and income. The ALICE Household Survival Budget calculates the cost of household basics for each county or jurisdiction in the National Capital Area, relying on a wide range of publicly available sources as outlined on page 5. Change over time in the cost of these household basics is tracked in the ALICE Essentials Index.

Household costs are compared to income to determine if households are **below the ALICE Threshold.** For household income, ALICE measures rely on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) – both household tabulated data and individual data from the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) records. To provide additional details on household assets, this Report also includes analysis of the Federal Reserve Board's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED) (2023).

Notes on Report Geography and Data Timeframe:

This report refers to both the National Capital Area[1] and the DC Metro Area[2], two distinct but overlapping regional designations. The National Capital Area refers to the fourteen jurisdictions served by United Way of the National Capital Area. The DC Metro Area refers to the *Washington-Arlington-Alexandria DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area*, a larger region defined by the US Office of Management and Budget. Some data sources (e.g. the Bureau of Labor Statistics) use the DC Metro Area as the most analogous geography available to the National Capital Area due to statistical limitations. Wherever feasible, data specific to the National Capital Area is privileged in this report. The full DC Metro Area report is also available on the United for ALICE website.

The data included in this report spans 2010 to 2023 (latest available). This data does not reflect policy or funding changes that have occurred since, yet it provides an important baseline and context to inform current conversations and decision making.

*[1] **National Capital Area** includes: District of Columbia; Arlington, Culpeper, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, and Rappahannock Counties and Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park Cities in Virginia; and Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties in Maryland.*

*[2] **DC Metro Area** includes the National Capital Area jurisdictions above, as well as the following: Clarke, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Warren Counties and Fredericksburg City in Virginia; Charles and Frederick Counties in Maryland; and Jefferson County in West Virginia.*

United For ALICE

Launched in 2009 with a study of financial hardship in one New Jersey county, the nonpartisan United For ALICE movement has grown to include 35 states and the District of Columbia. With a commitment to racial and economic justice, United For ALICE partners use the ALICE data to give voice to the challenges ALICE households face. Together, they inspire action to help ensure that all households have enough income for necessities and can save for the future.

This research is brought to you by United Way of the National Capital Area and is also sponsored by Kaiser Permanente and the Greater Washington Community Foundation. Learn more about how the ALICE data is being used to inform strategies and solutions across our partner states in the ALICE in Action Database.

KEY FINDINGS

Financial hardship: In 2023, of the 2,071,044 households in the National Capital Area, 8% (171,132) were below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and another 25% (510,950) were ALICE– households with income above the FPL, but not enough to afford the ALICE Household Survival Budget for their household composition and location. **Combining these two groups, 33% (682,082) of households in the National Capital Area were below the ALICE Threshold** (Figure 1).

The cost of basics: In the National Capital Area in 2023, the ALICE Household Survival Budget was $48,591 for a single adult and $118,208 for a family of four with two adults, an infant, and a preschooler – much higher than the FPL ($14,580 for an individual and $30,000 for a family of four). Basic costs varied substantially by location within the National Capital Area.

ALICE demographics: There were households below the ALICE Threshold across all demographic groups in the National Capital Area. However, due to systemic racism, ageism, gender discrimination, and geographic barriers that limit many families' access to resources and opportunities for financial stability, certain groups were more likely to experience hardship. These groups included American Indian/Alaska Native households (49% below the Threshold), Black households (45%), and Hispanic households (45%); households headed by people under age 25 (64%) or age 65 and older (41%); and single-parent-headed households (66% single-female-headed, 52% single-male-headed).

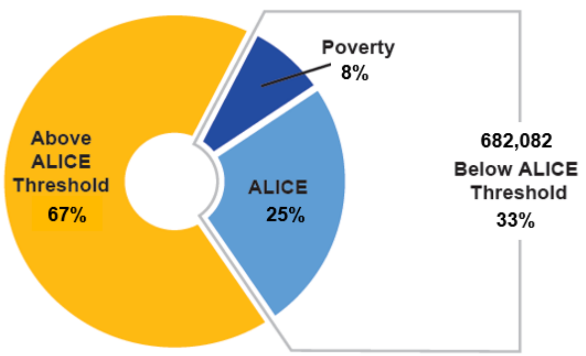
ALICE in the labor force: Of the 20 most common occupations in the DC Metro Area in 2023, seven paid less than $20 per hour. And of all workers in these occupations, 23% lived in households below the ALICE Threshold, with rates as high as 54% for janitors/cleaners and 49% for cashiers.

Regional Trends: Between 2010 and 2023, the total number of households in the DC Metro Area, increased by 18%, the number of households in poverty increased by 27%, and the number of ALICE households increased by 6%. Behind these overall trends, there were important changes in the numbers of families with children and 65+ households. In addition, housing affordability continued to be a challenge, and basic costs continued to outpace wages in low-wage jobs.

Stable households, stronger communities: If all households in the National Capital Area had enough income to meet their basic needs, not only would households' hardship be eased, but there would be a positive economic impact on the wider community through increased consumer spending and contributions to the tax base.

Figure 1.

One-Third of Households in the National Capital Area Faced Financial Instability in 2023



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2010–2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023

KEY TERMS

ALICE: Asset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed – households with income above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but less than the basic cost of living in their county

ALICE Household Survival Budget: Reflects the minimum costs of household necessities (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology) plus taxes, adjusted for all U.S. counties and various household compositions

ALICE Threshold: Derived from the Household Survival Budget, the minimum average income that a household needs to afford basic costs, calculated for all U.S. counties

Below ALICE Threshold: Includes households in poverty and ALICE households combined

Data Notes: *The income data used in this Report rely on ACS estimates. The ACS is based on a representative sample of housing units and people; therefore, these estimates have a degree of uncertainty. Some data points are geographic averages, others are one- or five-year averages depending on population size (these are reported in the Data Sheet). Percentages are rounded to whole numbers, sometimes resulting in percentages totaling 99% or 101%. ALICE analysis includes households regardless of work status, as employment is fluid and most households have members who are working, have worked, are out on disability, or are looking for work. ALICE analysis includes families and roommates but does not include people who are unhoused or living in group quarters (such as college residence halls, skilled nursing facilities, and military barracks).*

BASIC COSTS: THE ALICE HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL BUDGET

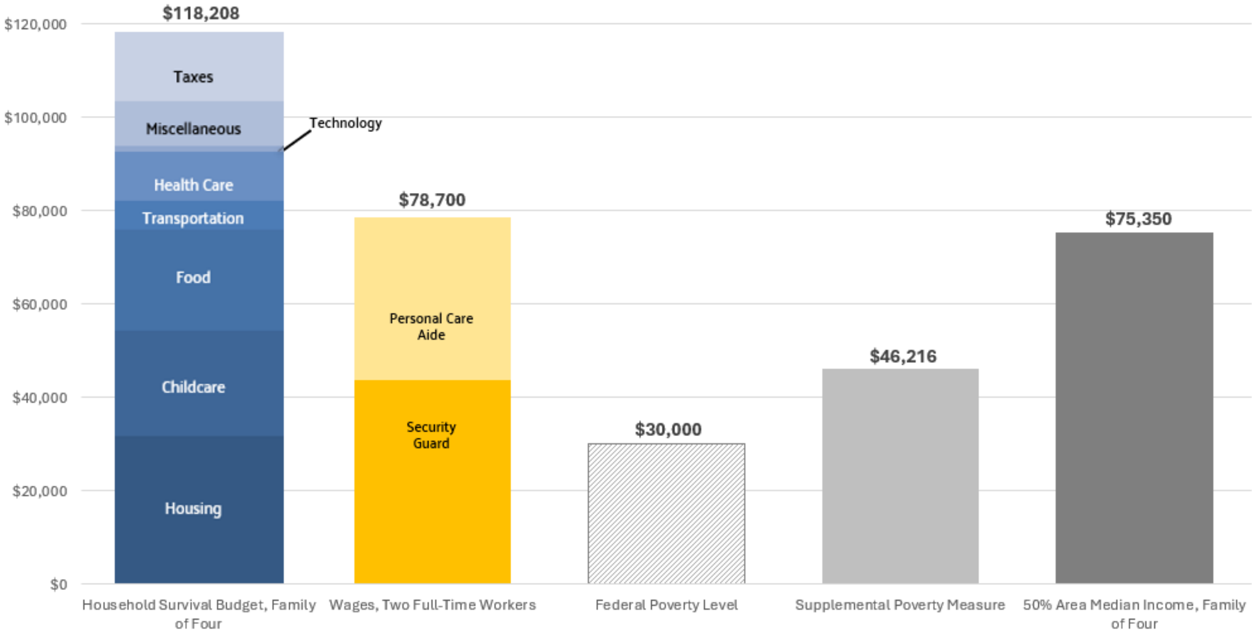
To capture the reality of household costs across the National Capital Area, **the ALICE Household Survival Budget is calculated for all jurisdictions and various household compositions.** This budget reflects the minimum cost to live and work in today's economy. (See the Budget Overview on page 5 and use the ALICE Budget and Income Status Tool for custom budgets by household composition and location.)

Figure 2 illustrates the mismatch between costs, wages, and official measures of financial hardship. It includes ALICE Household Survival Budget costs for a National Capital Area family with two adults, an infant, and a preschooler (totaling $118,202 annually) and the combined full-time wages of two common National Capital Area occupations – a personal care aide and a security guard (totaling $78,700 annually). Figure 2 also compares costs and income to three governmental measures of financial hardship:

- **The Federal Poverty Level** (FPL): The FPL relies on an outdated methodology for household costs; it does not account for cost-of-living differences across the continental U.S., or within states; and it is adjusted by the Consumer Price Index, which underestimates inflation in essential costs (as demonstrated by the ALICE Essentials Index). In 2023, the FPL was $14,580 for a single adult and $30,000 for a family of four.
- **The Supplemental Poverty Measure** (SPM): First published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011, the SPM is based on the costs of food, clothing, shelter, and utilities. In 2023, the SPM threshold for a renter household with two adults and two children in the National Capital Area was $46,216.
- **Area Median Income** (AMI): The AMI is the midpoint of income distribution within a geographic area (half of households earn more, half earn less). Percentages of AMI are used for federal housing assistance; very low-income households earn less than 50% of AMI, the typical threshold for Section 8 eligibility. AMI is based on income, not costs, so it does not capture whether households can afford basic expenses. In the National Capital Area in 2023, for a four-person household, 50% of AMI was $75,350 – substantially higher than the FPL and the SPM, but still well below the Household Survival Budget.

Figure 2. Basic Costs Exceeded Wages of Common Jobs and Official Measures of Hardship

Annual Budget, Wages, and Official Measures of Financial Hardship, Family of Four, National Capital Area, 2023



Note: Personal care aides monitor the condition of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses and help them with daily living activities. Security guards guard, patrol, or monitor premises to prevent theft, violence, or infractions of rules.

***Sources:** ALICE Household Survival Budget, 2023; Bureau of Labor Statistics–Occupational Employment Statistics, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, Supplemental Poverty Measure, 2023; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Area Median Income (State Income Limits), 2023*

ALICE Household Survival Budget, National Capital Area		Average Costs, 2023		
	Budget Item Description and Sources *(See [Methodology] for more details)*	**Single Adult, Age 18–64**	**Single Adult, Age 65+**	**2 Adults, 1 Infant, 1 Preschooler**
Housing	110% of Fair Market Rent (FMR) for an efficiency, one-bedroom, or two-bedroom apartment (based on family size), including utilities, adjusted in metro areas using Small Area FMR ***Source:*** *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)* **Update:** As of 2023, based on HUD's new FMR policy, housing costs are calculated using 110% of FMR to more accurately reflect the rental market. Small Area FMR is used in metro areas, where rents are higher than 110% of FMR. In prior years, costs used standard FMR and were adjusted in metro areas using ACS housing costs. To avoid reporting artificial rent decreases, 2022 rents are used if higher than 2023 rents.	$1,956	$1,956	$2,279
Child Care	Cost for registered Family Child Care Homes for infants (0–2 years), preschool-age children (3–4 years), and school-age children (5–12 years) ***Sources:*** *D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education; Maryland State Department of Education Division of Early Childhood; Virginia Department of Education; West Virginia Department of Human Services*	$0	$0	$2,398
Food	USDA Thrifty Food Plan by age, with county variation from Feeding America Sources: Feeding America; U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	$516	$516	$1,523
Transportation	Operating costs for a car (average daily miles by age, cost per mile, license, fees, and insurance), or public transportation where viable ***Sources:*** *AAA, Federal Highway Administration, National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) (car); Consumer Expenditure Survey (CEX) (public transportation)* **Update:** The source for insurance premiums changed from the Zebra to NAIC in 2023; rates are similar and updated more frequently.	$284	$250	$618
Health Care	Health insurance premiums based on employer-sponsored plans plus out-of-pocket costs for households with $40,000–$69,999 annual income by age, weighted with the poor-health multiplier. For the ALICE 65+ Survival Budget, cost of Medicare Parts A and B, out-of-pocket costs, plus average out-of-pocket spending for the top five chronic diseases as reported by CMS. ***Sources:*** *Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS); CEX (health); Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)*	$200	$550	$817
Technology	Basic broadband internet at home and a smartphone plan with unlimited data for each adult in a household ***Sources***: *Consumer Reports; USTelecom*	$86	$86	$116
Miscellaneous	Cost overruns estimated at 10% of the budget, excluding taxes, to cover one-time unanticipated costs within the other categories	$309	$336	$775
Taxes	Federal payroll taxes (Social Security and Medicare) and federal, state, and local income taxes owed on household income to cover the Survival Budget, as well as the federal Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit ***Sources:*** *Internal Revenue Service; Tax Foundation; calculated for United For ALICE by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (FRBA)* **Note:** 2022 tax data was revised by FRBA for this update.	$655	$732	$1,325
	Monthly Total	$4,049	$4,426	$9,851
	Annual Total	$48,591	$53,113	$118,208
	Hourly Full-Time Earnings Needed to Support the Household Survival Budget*	$23.36	$25.54	$56.83

**Represents the earnings needed at 40 hours/week, 50 weeks/year to support the annual total, including taxes; holidays and vacation days adjusted.*

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

There are households below the ALICE Threshold across the National Capital Area, and they reflect a wide range of demographics and household types (Figure 3). However, some groups had a higher rate of financial hardship in 2023, a result of factors including systemic racism, ageism, gender discrimination, and geographic barriers that limit many families' access to resources and opportunities for financial stability:

- **Age:** In 2023, the youngest and oldest households had the highest rates of financial hardship: 64% of households headed by someone under age 25 and 41% of households headed by someone age 65 and over lived below the ALICE Threshold in the National Capital Area. By comparison, rates were lower for those in their prime working years, with 30% of households headed by people age 25–44 and 28% of households headed by those age 45–64 living below the Threshold. Younger and older households face challenges including limited earning potential (e.g., due to student status, entry-level wages, or retirement), higher expenses (e.g., cost of child care, or greater health costs associated with aging), and age discrimination in the workforce.
- **Race/ethnicity:** Rates of financial hardship differed substantially by race/ethnicity in the National Capital Area. In 2023, the largest number of households below the ALICE Threshold were Black (253,327), making up 45% of Black households. White households were the next largest group (208,822), making up 23% of all White households. There were also 127,049 Hispanic households below the Threshold, making up 45% of all Hispanic households. Substantial shares of other, smaller groups also experienced hardship: 49% of American Indian/Alaska Native households, 35% of Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander households, 34% of households headed by someone of Two or More Races, and 29% of Asian households were below theThreshold.
- **Household type:** In 2023, 31% of single or cohabiting households without children headed by someone under age 65 – the most common household type – were below the ALICE Threshold in the National Capital Area. Among families with children, 30% were below the Threshold. And longstanding disparities in financial hardship byhousehold type remained: 66% of single-female-headed families and 52% of single-male-headed families were below the Threshold, compared to 19% of married-parent families.
- **Location:** In 2023, across the National Capital Area, the percentage of households below the Threshold was highest in Prince George's County, Maryland at 41% and lowest in Loudoun County, Virginia at 24%. Hardship varied even within counties: For example, in Prince George's County, Maryland, the percentage of households below the Threshold ranged from 12% in ZIP code 20720 (Bowie/Fairwood) to 67% in ZIP code 20710 (Bladensburg).

INTERACTIVE ALICE DATA

ALICE data is available online by race/ethnicity, age of householder, household type, county, county subdivision, census designated place, ZIP code, and legislative district. See all available geographies and more on the ALICE Mapping Tool.

Figure 3. Financial Hardship Varied Substantially by Demographic Group

Key Demographic Groups, National Capital Area, 2023

	Total	Below ALICE Threshold	Poverty	ALICE	Above ALICE Threshold
ALL HOUSEHOLDS	**2,071,044**	**682,082**	8%	25%	67%
AGE					
Under 25 Years	65,215	41,514	31%	31%	36%
25 to 44 Years	762,156	230,307	7%	24%	70%
45 to 64 Years	768,132	215,083	7%	21%	72%
65 Years and Over	475,541	195,178	10%	31%	59%
RACE/ETHNICITY					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	8,250	4,046	8%	41%	51%
Asian	222,527	64,193	5%	24%	71%
Black	556,778	253,327	10%	35%	55%
Hispanic	284,717	127,049	5%	39%	56%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1,116	338	7%	28%	64%
Two or More Races	156,713	53,997	5%	29%	66%
White	909,603	208,822	4%	19%	77%
HOUSEHOLD TYPE					
Married With Children	425,822	80,753	4%	15%	81%
Single-Female-Headed With Children	107,935	71,358	25%	41%	34%
Single-Male-Headed With Children	42,835	22,145	13%	39%	48%
Single or Cohabiting, Under 65, no Children	1,018,893	312,648	8%	23%	69%

Note: The groups shown in this figure are based on head of household and overlap across categories. Within the race/ethnicity category, all racial categories except Two or More Races are for one race alone. Race and ethnicity are overlapping categories; in this Report, the American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian (includes other Pacific Islanders), and Two or More Races groups may include Hispanic households. The White group includes only White, non-Hispanic households. The Hispanic group may include households of any race. Because household poverty data is not available for the American Community Survey's race/ethnicity categories, annual income below $15,000 is used as a proxy.

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023

ALICE IN THE LABOR FORCE

Workers below the ALICE Threshold increasingly bear the brunt of economic change and uncertainty as the workforce shifts to incorporate new technology and automation and as employers increase reliance on non-standard work arrangements – like hourly paid work, part-time employment, and gig work. These arrangements make it easier to reduce work hours or cut employment altogether when the economy ebbs (which happened to a large degree during the COVID-19 pandemic) and expand them when demand increases (which happens seasonally for a range of industries such as hospitality, recreation, and retail sales).

In 2023, of the 20 most common occupations in the DC Metro Area as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), seven still paid less than $20 per hour. And of the workers in these 20 occupations, 23% were living in households below the ALICE Threshold. Occupations with the largest share of workers in households below the Threshold included janitors/cleaners (54%), cashiers (49%), home health and personal care aides (47%), fast food/counter workers (41%), and waiters/waitresses (40%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. A Large Share of Workers in the 20 Most Common Occupations Were Below the ALICE Threshold

Labor Characteristics, Most Common Occupations, DC Metro Area, 2023

Most Common Occupations	Total Employment (BLS)	Percent of Workers Below ALICE Threshold (ACS PUMS)	Median Hourly Wage (BLS)
General and Operations Managers	105,320	8%	$68.62
Business Operations Specialists	78,850	10%	$48.47
Software Developers	72,010	4%	$68.03
Management Analysts	71,340	6%	$57.44
Retail Salespersons	62,660	31%	$16.89
Fast Food and Counter Workers	60,820	41%	$16.44
Cashiers	59,010	49%	$15.91
Janitors and Cleaners	53,920	54%	$17.74
Accountants and Auditors	45,080	9%	$46.79
Waiters and Waitresses	44,640	40%	$17.54
Registered Nurses	43,360	10%	$47.12
Customer Service Representatives	39,450	35%	$21.03
Security Guards	39,240	33%	$21.69
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	38,500	20%	$23.86
Office Clerks	38,490	20%	$22.42
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	37,880	47%	$16.90
Project Management Specialists	37,810	5%	$54.50
Stockers and Order Fillers	37,630	37%	$17.70
Computer Occupations	35,220	8%	$65.75
Sales Representatives of Services	30,390	11%	$34.88

Note: *BLS = Bureau of Labor Statistics; ACS PUMS = American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample. This figure includes all workers with income from these occupations (full-time, part-time, and freelance). ALICE Threshold status is determined by comparing workers' total household income to the ALICE Household Survival Budget for their household composition and location.*

Sources: *ALICE Threshold, 2023; Bureau of Labor Statistics–Occupational Employment Statistics, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, PUMS, 2023*

The Labor Landscape

Full- and part-time work: Though the majority of adults in the DC Metro Area were working in 2023 and most households had at least one worker, only 27% of the population age 16 and over had the security of a full-time job with a salary. Of those in the labor force (blue bars in Figure 5), nearly two-thirds (63%) were paid hourly and/or worked part time. Workers who are paid by the hour are more likely to have fluctuations in income due to schedule changes and variable hours, and they are less likely to receive benefits, such as health insurance, paid time off, family leave, or retirement plans.

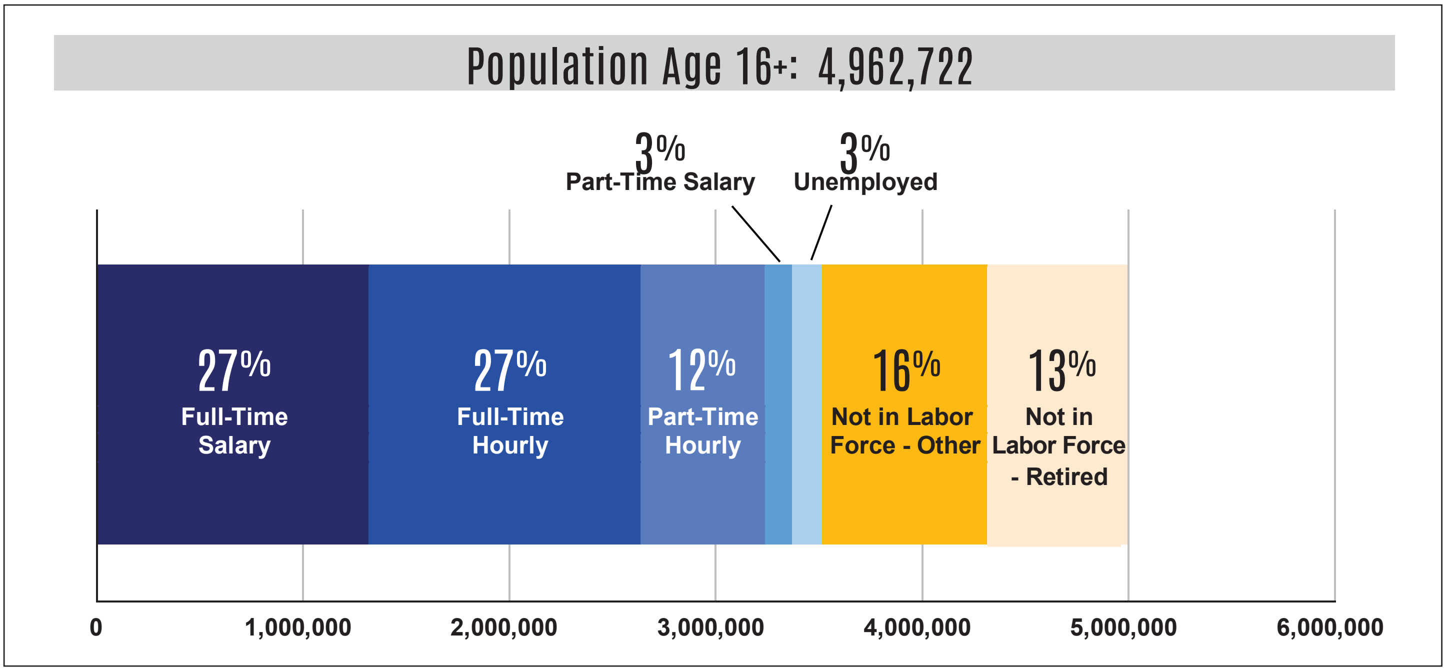
Unemployment: In 2023, 3% of people age 16 and over in the DC Metro Area were unemployed – not currently working but looking for work in the prior four weeks (light blue bar in Figure 5). The unemployment rate for workers below the ALICE Threshold in different parts of the metro area is often notably higher than the official rate. To see more data on workers below the ALICE Threshold in your community, visit UnitedForALICE.org/ALICE-EVD.

Out of the labor force: Another 29% of people age 16 and over in the DC Metro Area were out of the labor force in 2023 (gold bars in Figure 5), including those who were retired (13%) and those who were out of the labor force for other reasons, such as disability, health issues, caregiving responsibilities, or student status (16%).

For more data on the labor landscape, visit UnitedForALICE.org/Labor-Force/DC-Metro.

Figure 5. Just Over One-Fourth of People Worked Salaried, Full-Time Jobs

Labor Status, Population Age 16+, DC Metro Area, 2023



Note: Data for full- and part-time jobs is only available at the national level; these national rates (approximately 50% of full-time workers and 82% of part-time workers paid hourly) have been applied to the total workforce to calculate the breakdown shown in this figure. Full-time represents a minimum of 35 hours per week at one or more jobs for 48 weeks per year.

Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023

SPOTLIGHT ON SAVINGS AND ASSETS

When households are not earning enough to cover basic costs, their ability to save for emergencies, retirement, or other future needs is greatly hindered. According to the Federal Reserve Board's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED), in 2023, respondents below the ALICE Threshold in the South Atlantic Census Division (which includes the National Capital Area) were far less likely than those above the Threshold to have savings that could cover three months of expenses in the event of an emergency (32% vs. 71%), or to have retirement assets (38% vs. 89%). Additionally, non-retirees below the Threshold were less likely to say that their retirement savings plan was on track (12%, vs. 34% above the Threshold).

TRENDS IN THE DC METRO AREA

Over the last decade, the number of ALICE households in the DC Metro Area has been consistently high as household income failed to keep up with the cost of basics. When prices increase faster than wages, purchasing power decreases. This is especially challenging for households below the ALICE Threshold that are already struggling to make ends meet.

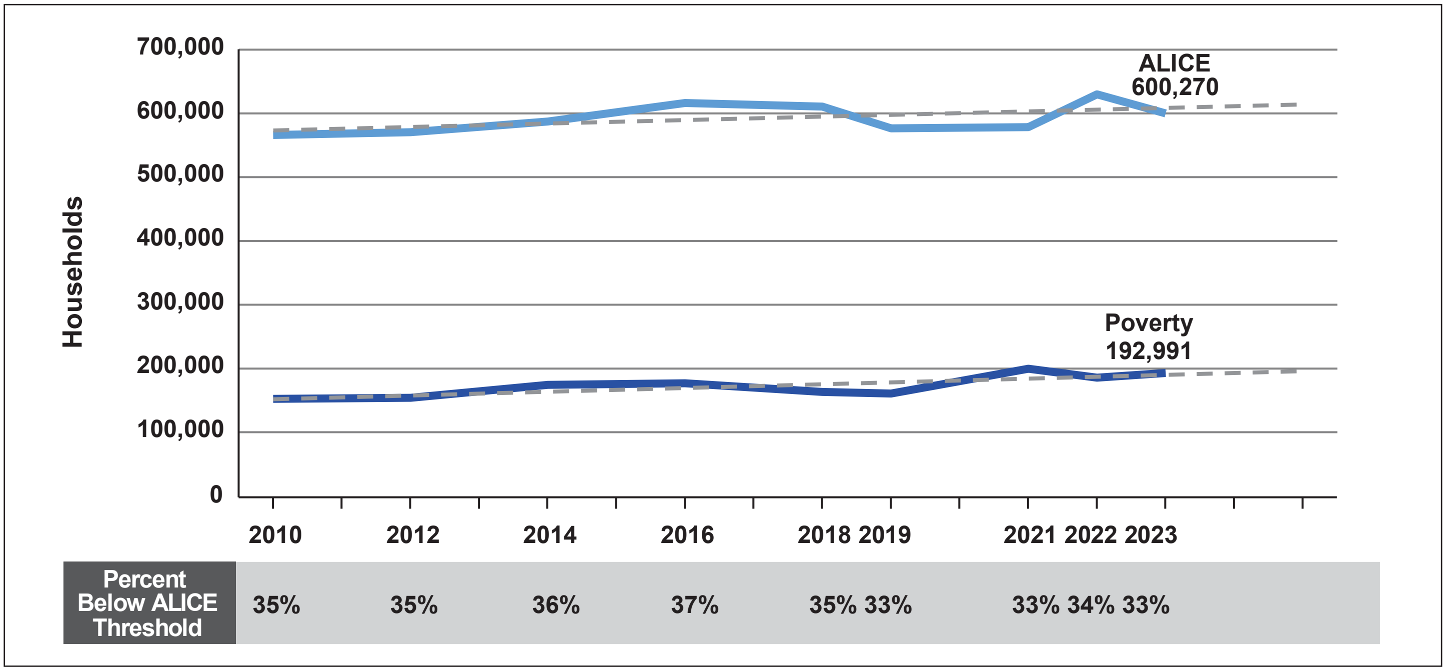
Between 2010 and 2023, the total number of households in the DC Metro Area increased by 18%, the number of households in poverty increased by 27%, and the number of ALICE households increased by 6%. During this period, households below the ALICE Threshold in the DC Metro Area consistently made up between 33% and 37% of all households (Figure 6).

From 2010 to 2023, the demographic groups with the largest percentage increase in the number of households below the ALICE Threshold included married-parent households, households headed by people age 65+, and households in rural communities.

Most recently, from 2022 to 2023, the number of ALICE households decreased, while the number of households in poverty increased slightly. It will be important to track whether these trends continue or shift direction in the coming years.

Figure 6. Number of ALICE Households Decreased While Number of Poverty-Level Households Increased in Recent Update

Number of Households by Income, DC Metro Area, 2010–2023



Note: *The gray dashed trend lines in this figure highlight the general direction of the point-in-time data for the years shown. These lines indicate whether the numbers of ALICE and*
poverty-level households have been generally increasing, decreasing, or remaining flat. The Poverty trend line is statistically significant at =<0.01; however, the ALICE trend line is not statistically significant, and caution should be used when making predictions.

Sources: *ALICE Threshold, 2010–2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010–2023*

Families with children: Contrary to the national trend, the number of households with children under age 18 increased from 2010 to 2023 in the DC Metro Area, up 8%. This trend was driven by an increase in married-parent and single-male-headed households (up 11% and 16%, respectively). The number of single-female-headed households decreased 8% during the same period. In terms of households with children below the ALICE Threshold, the number increased for married-parent households (up 7%), decreased for single-female-headed households (down 13%), and remained largely unchanged for single-male-headed households (down 2%).

Older Americans: With the aging of the Baby Boomer generation, households headed by people age 65 and over were the fastest-growing age group in the DC Metro Area (up 66% between 2010 and 2023). They were also the age group with the most substantial increase in the number of households below the ALICE Threshold (reaching 42% of all 65+ households in 2023).

Wages: Across the country, wages increased from 2018 to 2023, growing fastest in 2022. In 2023, wage growth slowed yet remained above pre-pandemic levels. But while wage increases help households cover costs, they have generally not been enough to make up for years of falling behind. For example, in 2010, retail sales workers – selling goods ranging from clothes to appliances to cars – earned a median wage of $10.59 per hour ($22,030 annually for full-time work) in the DC Metro Area. This worker's household fell $29,285 short of the annual Household Survival Budget for a family with one adult and one school-age child ($51,315). By 2023, the median wage for this occupation increased by 78%, to $18.81 per hour ($39,125 annually, full-time). Yet the annual Household Survival Budget for one adult and one school-age child also grew (to $63,732), still leaving these essential workers $24,607 short of covering basic costs.

Housing: Housing costs continued to be a challenge for households below the ALICE Threshold. In 2023, 27% of all renter households below the Threshold in the DC Metro Area paid 30% to 49% of their income on housing. An additional 48% paid half of their income or more. **Combined, 75% of all renter households below the Threshold in the DC Metro Area were rent burdened** (paying 30% or more of their income on rent and utilities). For homeowners below the Threshold, 61% were housing burdened (paying 30% or more of their income on homeowner costs, including mortgage payments, utilities, and homeowner's insurance).

HEAR ALICE VOICES

ALICE is speaking. Are we listening? Visit ALICEvoices.org to hear firsthand insights from ALICE workers and families – or tell your own story.

STABLE HOUSEHOLDS, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Households below the ALICE Threshold play a vital role in their communities – as neighbors, family members, and civic participants. They also contribute to their local economies – as workers, consumers, and taxpayers. Yet these households, more than 793,261 households in the DC Metro Area (including 682,082 in the National Capital Area), did not earn enough to cover basic costs in 2023.

This is not a new problem. The share of households below the ALICE Threshold in the DC Metro Area has varied only slightly for more than a decade, persisting through shifting economic conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic, and across political administrations.

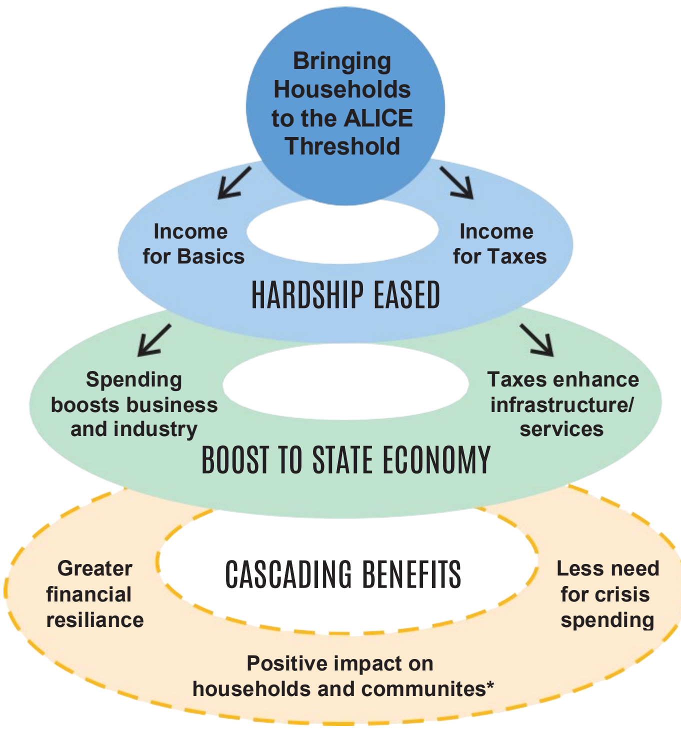
This is not a small problem. In the DC Metro Area, 33% of all households were below the ALICE Threshold in 2023. These households face day-to-day challenges of trying to make ends meet, while also being more vulnerable to the impacts of crises, both widespread (i.e., natural disasters, public health emergencies) and personal (from unexpected car repairs to major health issues). And while isolated interventions can help ameliorate some of these challenges, the core issue remains: There is a wide gap between households' income and what they need to make endsmeet.

But what if all households had enough income to cover their basic needs? **In the DC Metro Area, bringing all households to the ALICE Threshold would have taken $27.3 billion in 2023**. Working to meet this gap through coordinated effort and investment from multiple sectors, including government, nonprofit, business, and philanthropy, would change the trajectory for households in the DC Metro Area that are struggling financially – and it would also benefit the local economy.

This matters for all of us. Households below the ALICE Threshold are more likely to spend than to save additional income, so this income would largely go back into the economy as households spend to cover costs and pay additional taxes.

Increased spending in the local economy has a multiplier effect. Mark Zandi, Chief Economist at Moody's Analytics, estimates economic multipliers for additional household income spending on food (1.57), utilities (1.27), and other necessities (1.42). For instance, every dollar spent on food spurs an additional 57 cents in business growth in the retail, agriculture, trucking, and rail freight industries.

There are also economic multipliers for the additional income taxes that households below the ALICE Threshold would pay. Zandi estimates economic multipliers for tax revenue spent on aid to state and local governments (1.27) and transportation infrastructure (1.23), meaning that every dollar households below the Threshold pay in additional taxes would fuel even more in state and local investments.



**See Figure 7 for additional details/sources related to the benefits of meeting basic needs.*

Beyond these economic contributions, there are cascading benefits of meeting basic needs in the DC Metro Area (Figure 7). If all households are on a more solid financial footing, communities can look beyond crisis spending and poverty alleviation toward broader community well-being. For example, funding that went toward emergency housing or food assistance could be redirected to create more affordable housing and locally grown food systems for the long term. Funding could also be used to enhance opportunities for civic engagement, arts, and recreation. Together, these investments can improve physical and mental health and overall quality of life – not just for ALICE families, but for entire communities and the DC Metro Area as a whole.

Figure 7. Cascading Benefits of Meeting Basic Needs

If households have sufficient income for…	Benefits for ALICE Households	Benefits for the Wider Community
Safe, Affordable Housing	Improved physical and mental health through safer environments and reduced stress; improved educational performance and outcomes for children; greater stability for household members; a means to build wealth and racial equity for homeowners	Expanded and updated housing stock, reduced systemic housing inequities; lower health care costs; reduced homelessness; increased opportunities for jobs and more money spent in local communities
Quality Child Care and Education	Increased labor force participation, lifetime earnings and retirement security for women; health benefits for children, school readiness, improved educational attainment and graduation rates; improved performance in higher education; higher lifetime earnings	Reduced racial/ethnic inequalities in learning and development; positive health, education, and economic outcomes for children and families; stronger community economies; more homebuyers and higher property values through availability of quality child care
Adequate Food	Decreased food insecurity; improved health (especially for children and adults age 65 and over); decreased likelihood of developmental delays and behavioral problems in school	Lower health care costs; improved school and workplace productivity; less spending on emergency food services; greater equity by gender, race/ethnicity and immigration status
Reliable Transportation	Decreased transportation insecurity; improved access to work/job opportunities, school and child care, health care and social services, food/retail markets, and support systems (friends, family, faith communities)	Improved air quality and reduced gasoline consumption/carbon emissions; increased economic opportunity through returns on investment; a more diverse labor market; decreased income disparities; more integrated neighborhoods
Quality Health Care	Better mental and physical health (including increased life expectancy); improved access to preventive care; fewer missed days of work and school; decreased need for emergency services; lower share of income spent on health	Decreased health care spending and strain on emergency services; reduced racial/ethnic disparities in insurance coverage and access to care; fewer communicable diseases; improved workplace productivity; decreased wealth-health gap; better outcomes during health crises
Reliable Technology	Improved access to job opportunities; expanded access to health information and telemedicine services; increased job and academic performance	Closing the "digital divide" in access to technology by income; increased economic development; increased connectivity and social inclusion that helps reduce social, economic, and political disparities
Savings	Ability to withstand emergencies without impacting long-term financial stability; greater asset accumulation over time (e.g., interest on savings; ability to invest in education, property, or finance a secure retirement)	Less spending on public services to cover basic needs like health care, food, and housing — especially for unexpected or emergency expenses

We All Have a Role to Play

Our vision is a country where ALICE families not only have sufficient income to afford the basics but can also save and invest in their future. This is a vision not only for ALICE, but for the nation as a whole. The information presented in this Report can help stakeholders prioritize economic prosperity for all. We all have a role to play:

Community members:

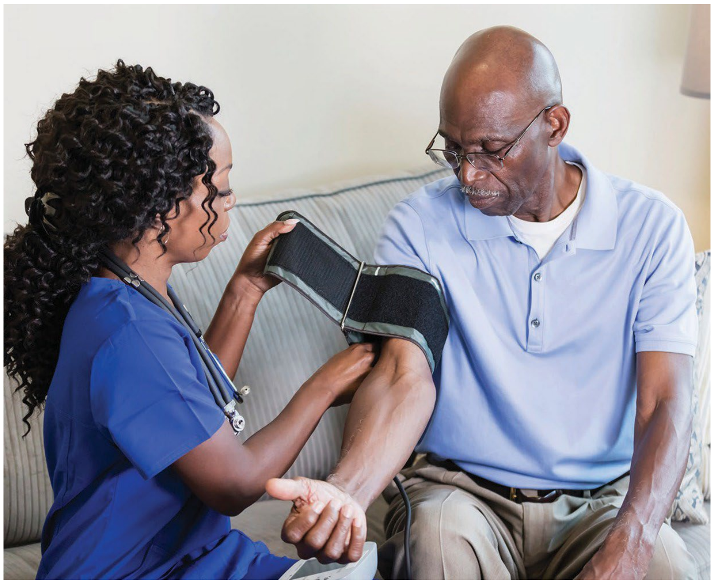
- Raise awareness of ALICE through ALICE news and videos or share your experiences
- Connect with your local United Way for advocacy, support, and volunteer opportunities
- Advocate for the continuation of current government datasets (e.g., American Community Survey, Fair Market Rents). Consistent data over time is crucial for informed decision-making, effective policy implementation, and accountability.

Policymakers and nonprofits:

- Explore ALICE by district using the Legislative District Tool
- Map ALICE by location to pinpoint need and identify gaps in community resources
- Use interactive tools from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (which use ALICE budgets), including the Policy Rules Database and the Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster
- See examples of policies, practices, and programs United For ALICE partners have implemented using ALICE data

Employers:

- Implement strategies that support the well-being and retention of ALICE workers while also boosting engagement, productivity, and the bottom line
- Advocate for community resources that support your employees – from affordable housing to quality child care



ALICE ONLINE

Visit UnitedForALICE.org to explore interactive data and resources. Click the icons below to get started.

National Overview National data and state comparison	**ALICE Demographics** State, county, and regional demographic data	**ALICE Household Budgets** State, county, and regional budgets
NEW **Mapping Tool** Explore data for all available geographies (state, county, municipality, ZIP code)	NEW **Income Status Tool** Input income, household type, and location to see household ALICE status	**County Reports** All available county data in a shareable format
Legislative District Tool See data by state upper and lower chambers and congressional district	**Economic Viability Dashboard** Key data on work, housing, and community resources	**ALICE Essentials Index** Data on change over time in the cost of household basics
Data Sheet State ALICE data over time and by location	**Wage Tool** Identify counties where select hourly wages can support basic costs	**ALICE in Focus** A closer look at hardship for children, people with disabilities, and veterans
Methodology Sources and calculations used in the ALICE research	**Research Advisory Committees** Learn about the members and roles of these critical groups	**National ALICE Team** Meet members of the United For ALICE staff
NEW **ALICE Voices** Hear directly from ALICE or share your own ALICE story	NEW **ALICE in Action** Programs, practices, and policy changes implemented by the ALICE network	**ALICE Videos** Videos that highlight ALICE stories, research, and partner impact

ABOUT UNITED FOR ALICE AND OUR PARTNERS

The State of ALICE in the National Capital Area: 2025 Update on Financial Hardship is brought to you by United Way of the National Capital Area in partnership with United For ALICE, a driver of innovative research and action to promote financial stability for **ALICE**® (**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed) households. With a commitment to racial and economic justice, United For ALICE and local partners share this work with foundations, government, corporations, and other nonprofits to inform policy and promote positive change for ALICE households.

The grassroots ALICE movement, developed by United Way of Northern New Jersey, has spread to 35 states and the District of Columbia. Learn more about the ALICE movement here.

To create the ALICE Reports, our team of researchers works with Research Advisory Committees composed of experts from our partner states. This work is guided by our rigorous methodology, which is updated biennially with experts from across our Research Advisory Committees.

Director and Lead Researcher: Stephanie Hoopes, Ph.D.

ALICE Research Team: Andrew Abrahamson; Ashley Anglin, Ph.D.; Catherine Connelly, D.M.H., M.A.; Jessica Fernandez; Dana Isaac; Victoria Mutuku, M.A.

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D.C. Research Advisory Committee:

- Anthony Featherstone, MBA, *WorkSource Montgomery*
- Ayeola Fortune, M.A., *United Way Worldwide*
- Kecia Hayes, Ph.D., *School of Education, American University*
- Leah Hendey, M.P.P., *Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, Urban Institute–Greater D.C.*
- Shannon R. Mouton, *Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.*
- Adam Scavette, Ph.D., M.S.E., *Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia*
- Robert Sheehan, Ph.D., *Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland*
- Daniel Sturm, M.A., *Maryland Food Bank*

To learn more about how you can get involved in advocating and creating change for ALICE in the National Capital Area, contact: **Scott Mengebier** at smengebier@uwnca.org.

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