**Pandemic Impact: 6,872 Des Moines County Households Financially Insecure**

*New ALICE Report shows pandemic aids temporarily blunted the financial crisis, yet warning signs are on the horizon.*

*Callout Box: The Burlington/ West Burlington Area United Way is collecting audio testimonials from ALICE individuals about the difficult financial choices they continue to face today given the high cost of essentials and ongoing inflation. Voice messages can be recorded at: ALICEvoices.org.*

**BURLINGTON, IA —** The ranks of the 17,042 Des Moines County households unable to afford the basics grew by more than 550 during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a total of 6,872 households or 40% struggling to afford the basics by 2021, according to a new report from The Burlington/ West Burlington Area United Way and its research partner United For ALICE.

That calculation includes the 2,587 households in poverty as well as another 4,285 families defined as **ALICE** (**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed), earning above the Federal Poverty Level but less than what’s needed to survive in the modern economy. ALICE families have been overlooked and undercounted by traditional poverty measures. ALICE is the nation’s childcare workers, home health aides and cashiers heralded during the pandemic – those working low-wage jobs, with little or no savings and one emergency from poverty.

*ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Iowa* shows that the total number of financially insecure households rose by 3% between 2019 and 2021 – more than double the 1% increase in the county’s overall population. The number of ALICE households increased by 511 during that time. Similarly, there were 43 more families falling below the federal poverty line.

Iowa ranked 41st in financial hardship among all 50 states, with one of the nation’s lowest percentages of households struggling to make ends meet in 2021. In comparison, Des Moines County ranked 25th in financial hardship among the 99 counties in Iowa, with one of the highest percentages of households struggling to make ends meet in 2021.

While job disruptions and inflation delivered significant financial pain, a combination of pandemic supports and rising wages did help to blunt what could have been a deeper financial crisis, the report finds. However, as some benefits are peeled back, and inflation persists, signs of greater financial stress are on the horizon.

According to the report, for a family of four with an infant and a preschooler, the annual ALICE Household Survival Budget, which is the basic cost needed to live and work in Iowa, was $61,308 in 2021. The Child Tax Credit and Child Dependent Care Tax Credit helped to soften the blow, bringing the family Survival Budget down to $26,500. The median household income in Des Moines County is $54,318 compared to the state average of $65,600.

Even with the variety of temporary pandemic supports available, in 2021, a family of four with two-full time workers earning salaries as a retail salesperson and a cashier – two of the most common occupations in Iowa – fell short of affording the family budget by $2,876.

“A positive change during the pandemic was that tax credits, stimulus payments and rental assistance were available for ALICE households and provided strong relief,” said Stephanie Hoopes, Ph.D., United For ALICE National Director. “However, as some of these supports come to an end, growing food insufficiency and other indicators reveal continued stress. Ignoring these warning signs places ALICE, our economy, and the well-being of our communities at great risk.”

Additional report insights include:

* Racial disparities persist in the rates of financial hardship; 61% of Black and 46% of Hispanic households were below the ALICE Threshold in 2021, compared to 34% of white households.
* By age of householder, households headed by someone under the age of 25 or over 65 had among the highest rates of hardship. 62% of Iowa’s youngest and 46% of Iowa’s oldest households could not afford basics in 2021.

* In 2021, 70% of the 20 most common jobs in Iowa paid less than $20 per hour. Earning less than $20 hourly was not enough to support a family of four with an infant and a preschooler, even with two parents earning this salary.

To read the report and access online, interactive dashboards that provide data on financial hardship at the state, county and local level, visit United4ALICE.org/ALICECrosscurrents.

**About The Burlington/ West Burlington Area United Way**

The Burlington/West Burlington Area United Way is a nonprofit organization that serves the Greater Burlington Area. Their mission is to improve the lives of individuals and families in the community by mobilizing the caring power of donors, volunteers, and partner agencies. The organization works to address critical community needs in the areas of education, income, and health, and supports a variety of programs and services aimed at creating lasting, positive change. The organization raises funds through workplace campaigns, donations, and grants to support its programs and services.

**About United For ALICE**

United For ALICE is a driver of innovation, research and action to improve life across the country for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) and for all. Through the development of the ALICE measurements, a comprehensive, unbiased picture of financial hardship has emerged. Harnessing this data and research on the mismatch between low-paying jobs and the cost of survival, ALICE partners convene, advocate and collaborate on solutions that promote financial stability at local, state and national levels. This grassroots ALICE movement, led by United Way of Northern New Jersey, has spread to 27 states and includes United Ways, corporations, nonprofits and foundations in Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawai‘i, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Washington, D.C., West Virginia and Wisconsin; we are United For ALICE. For more information, visit: [UnitedForALICE.org](https://www.unitedforalice.org/).