



2021 Advocacy Platform

For over 80 years, United Way of Frederick County (UWFC) has fought for the health, education and financial stability of every person in our community. In Frederick County today, more than one out of three households struggle to afford the basic household necessities. These individuals & families are, in normal conditions, one unexpected expense away from spiraling into poverty. The ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed) Report reveals the true baseline cost of living of each county in Maryland, and counts these economically vulnerable households.

[The ALICE Report for Frederick County](#) has changed the way that UWFC approaches community needs and works to meet them. The report shows that it costs more to afford the combined annual cost of basic housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and other necessities in Frederick County than most counties in Maryland. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an exacerbating impact on ALICE families. We are especially concerned for senior, single mother, African-American and Hispanic populations. These groups are over-represented in our ALICE population, and are negatively impacted disproportionately by the pandemic. Based on these and other compelling needs, UWFC has compiled this 2021 Advocacy Platform*.

Ensure access to the flu vaccine, as well as testing and future vaccines for COVID-19

It is vital that all members of the Frederick community have equitable access to vaccines, including the flu vaccine and potential future COVID-19 vaccines, especially for those with limited budgets to pay for medical costs. UWFC also supports equitable access to fast and accurate COVID-19 testing and contact tracing for Frederick County residents.

Maintain food security for Frederick County residents

The ALICE Report shows that access to healthy food can be a challenge for working families. The COVID-19 crisis has placed further pressure on ALICE households to afford a healthy diet. We support the efficient and coordinated distribution of food to ensure that nobody goes hungry.

Make more affordable housing options available

The ALICE Report shows that housing is a major cost burden for low income households in Frederick County. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, over 50% of renters spent more than 30% of their monthly income on housing leaving little to cover other expenses and savings. UWFC supports programs and projects that will resolve Frederick County's affordable housing crisis. Eviction and foreclosure reduction programs for those affected by COVID-19 should continue until the crisis is abated. In addition, the City of Frederick should align its Accessory Dwelling Unity policy with that of Frederick County. We support the expansion of homebuyer assistance programs to include teachers, city and county workers to purchase homes in Frederick County.

Open a 24-hour county detox facility

ALICE families are more likely to suffer from substance use disorder and less likely to have resources to pay for treatment. UWFC continues to recommend that Frederick County increase access to recovery programs for residents in crisis. COVID-19 is magnifying this concern. As of June 30, 2020, there were 32 fatal overdoses in the year, compared to 25 in the same period in 2019. We advocate that the 24-hour detox facility at Marcie's Choice be opened as quickly as possible to county residents in crisis.

Increase the supply and accessibility of quality childcare for families

Childcare costs are a leading financial stressor for ALICE households, increasing over 20 percent from 2016 to 2018. The pandemic has further reduced accessibility. As of September 2020, 87% of childcare providers have reopened, but demand remains high. We are especially concerned for parents with school aged children who must work while schools are operating in a virtual or hybrid format. We support increased funding for childcare providers to increase their capacity and ability to reopen, and encourage continued collaboration between providers and Frederick County Public Schools to consider convenient childcare solutions for ALICE families.

Remove barriers to access online learning platforms for Frederick County students and continue efforts to eliminate the achievement gap

UWFC's education priority during the COVID-19 pandemic is to remove barriers to students' ability to access online learning platforms. This includes access to broadband, software and hardware, but also direct support of students to maintain academic progress and to eliminate systemic achievement gaps for students of color and other historically under-performing student populations during the pandemic.

Increase availability of broadband access to Frederick County residents

UWFC recognizes that there will be an increased need for individuals and families to have broadband access during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in order to utilize post-secondary online learning platforms, take advantage of telemedicine offerings, and access job opportunities and other basic necessities. UWFC is particularly concerned about access in rural communities and for seniors.

Increase support for veteran services and improve data on veteran needs

Veterans face many health, housing and financial stability challenges. Increased funding for local veterans programs will improve health, education, and financial stability outcomes for veterans and their families. Due to their age, much of the veteran population in Frederick County is more at risk of serious complications due to COVID-19. In addition, veterans who have suffered injuries during their service are more at risk during the pandemic for both physical and behavioral health issues.

Increase access to affordable transportation options

Emmitsburg, Thurmont and Brunswick have some of the highest ALICE percentages in the county. More transportation options would allow rural residents to explore new employment and education opportunities, take advantage of public supports, service the needs of the growing senior population, and receive needed medical care. Transportation is especially vital during the COVID-19 pandemic for access to jobs and medical care.

Continue support for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) in the state budget

The VITA program assists hundreds of Frederick County ALICE households each year with tax services and brings critical refunds back to the community. Every \$1 invested by Maryland in VITA results in an additional \$4 from federal and private sources for expanding VITA. Many VITA volunteers and clients are in high-risk population groups for COVID-19. It will be important to ensure Frederick County households continue to have access to VITA despite needed adaptations that will have to be made. State funding is critical for the continuation of VITA.

*UWFC advocacy positions include, but are not limited to, those listed on this platform.