

# Our Communities Can't Wait

**United Way is seizing this moment to reimagine and build equitable, thriving communities**

Covid-19 is an existential crisis that impacts everyone. While some have been able to work from home, many of our neighbors are making difficult tradeoffs between paying rent, putting food on their table, and keeping their kids engaged in remote learning. The state unemployment rate has skyrocketed from 2.4% to as high as 32.6% in hard-hit cities, pushing more than 330,000 families deeper into financial crisis

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley has raised and distributed over \$8 million to more than 300,000 vulnerable people, providing emergency financial assistance of \$300 on average to help pay for food, rent/housing, utilities, and other basic needs. More than 100,500 households received food assistance, 3,500 households had utility/rental help and another 8,000 households received general financial assistance. One hundred percent of donations to United Way were distributed to families in need. **In some of our target communities, many applicants for financial assistance have had no income since mid-March.**

**It's going to take much more than emergency financial assistance to help families and communities recover from this crisis and rebuild.** Critical early education and out of school time programs that families rely on to work have closed. Last year, nearly 46,000 children across the state in need of childcare were not enrolled in licensed programs, and more than 270 childcare centers forced to close during the crisis have not reopened. The eviction moratorium has expired, leaving an estimated 45,000 renter households and 35,000 owner households at risk of falling behind on housing payments. **The rent gap for these households could exceed \$40M in October alone.**

**United Way has the scale and reach to help.** We have a vision and a mandate to help our communities recover and rebuild, and we have the deep partnerships with hundreds of nonprofit organizations, state and municipal leaders, and businesses to be the region's go-to mobilizer to address these urgent needs and activate comprehensive, long-term solutions.

The Covid-19 crisis has illuminated and widened existing cracks in our human services safety net and education system like no other point in time in our history. But it is also a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine how we meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents and empower our communities to emerge stronger, equitable and more prepared for the future.

**Join us in raising \$52 million to lead a comprehensive community response to the ongoing crisis.**

## CURRENT CRISIS

**The state unemployment rate skyrocketed from 2.8% before Covid-19 hit to over 16% this summer.** It rebounded in August to just over 11% but has left a devastating financial impact on already vulnerable families. **Some cities, such as Lynn and Lawrence, are seeing unemployment rates as high as 32.6%.** Countless workers in our region remain underemployed with reduced hours and are struggling to make ends meet. The number of Massachusetts households experiencing food insecurity has jumped from eight percent last year to over 18% today.

**We are bracing for a potential tripling of evictions.** The Metropolitan Area Planning Council, which serves over 100 cities and towns in the region, estimates that 45,000 renter households and 35,000 owner households with one worker on standard unemployment is at risk of falling behind on housing payments. **The rent gap for these households could exceed \$40M in October alone.** In September, 15 percent of Massachusetts tenants in renter-occupied units reported they were behind on their monthly rent payments, and 21% reported they would not be able to make October payments. When the eviction moratorium is lifted, experts estimate 20,000 – 60,000 eviction cases will flood the courts. By comparison, in 2016 there were 16,000 cases filed for the entire year. **We cannot afford to let families become homeless at this scale.**

**COVID is pushing an already strained shelter system to the brink.** The depopulation of shelters because of the public health crisis meant the loss of 800 beds for a system that was already beyond capacity. The work of creating more deeply affordable, permanent supportive housing units available for high users of public institutions and unsheltered homeless individuals is even more critical, because even the hospitals and jails have nowhere to discharge individuals today.

**Racial and economic inequities are more glaring than ever.** The economic and health impacts of COVID-19 have hit communities of color disproportionately harder than the rest of our region. The rate of positive COVID-19 cases among Black and Latinx residents is 3x as high as the rate among white residents. Unemployment has hit communities of color harder, too. For example, MassINC recently reported 20% of Latinx residents are out of work. Food insecurity rates among Latinx and Black residents are 26% and 24%, compared to 13% for white residents.

**The early education sector is in a perilous situation.** High quality education and care is core to the healthy development of all children, yet families in marginalized communities face heightened barriers to access and affordability. Already costly and underfunded before the pandemic, the childcare sector in Massachusetts lost an estimated \$250 million each month during statewide closures. In Boston, for example, just 70% of providers have reopened this fall, amounting to roughly 65 percent of the city's total childcare capacity prior to COVID-19. The Mayor's Office of Women's Advancement estimates that Boston may have permanently lost a "significant portion" of its previous capacity -- potentially between 22 to 35 percent -- due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 related shutdowns.

**Remote learning has brought in a whole new set of challenges for families and afterschool programs.** There are over 127,000 students in 9 high-need communities in our region who have started school remotely this fall. And youth whose parents are at work, face the compounded challenge of having no supervision or support for remote learning. The out-of-school time field stands ready to partner with the school districts in their communities to support students and families, but 59% of afterschool/OST providers are unsure if their programs will be able to reopen after the pandemic. Many programs have furloughed staff and have received little financial assistance.

## **WE HAVE A MANDATE AND A VISION TO RECOVER AND REBUILD**

### **Preventing Homelessness and Fostering Financial Wellbeing**

**Goal: \$20 Million**

**A resilient community is one where everyone has safe, stable homes and the opportunity to pursue economic opportunity.** Informed by our partnership with a network of 75 housing agencies and our statewide campaign for permanent, supportive housing solutions, United Way worked tirelessly during the Covid-19 pandemic to prevent homelessness. We help families weather emergencies, pilot innovative programs, and

champion support for education equity for homeless children. **Last year, 12,000 individuals and families avoided homelessness because of our network's direct services.**

We are thinking big – planning to close the statewide gap of 160,000 units needed to provide housing to all our residents by developing a statewide roadmap to create more units for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

That is just the beginning. More than 330,000 households have one family member on unemployment, intensifying the urgency for immediate investment in both housing assistance and long-term economic empowerment. With a network of 63 career and financial coaching partners, United Way will develop new career pathways aligned with industry growth to provide people with more resilient employment. We will expand existing credit- and asset-building initiatives to empower every resident in their journey toward financial stability.

**\$20M will support the current response of 100 housing and economic resilience organizations AND reach an additional 15,000 families with meaningful direct services to avoid homelessness and build economic resilience.**

- \$3.7M to help provide long-term case management, eviction prevention specialization, legal services and financial assistance to 740 households at risk of homelessness due to income loss during the public health emergency.
- \$1.85M to scale financial coaching services to reach an additional 12,300 households, a service our Boston Builds Credit initiative identified as currently in need of additional capacity.
- \$1.85M would leverage the success of our Venture Fund model to provide \$75,000 awards to 25 emerging career pathways programs, empowering 1,250 households to pursue more resilient employment in the first 3 years.

## **Supporting Youth in the New Normal of Remote Learning** **Goal: \$15 million**

**Now more than ever, students need even more academic, social and emotional support to engage in learning.** Before the pandemic hit, more than 320,000 Massachusetts students were stranded on waiting lists for available afterschool & out-of-school time (OST) programs. United Way currently works with 87 nonprofit partners and is the largest private funder of out-of-school time (OST) programming in Massachusetts. **Last year, our network's direct services provided 62,700 school-age youth with safe environments for learning, enrichment, and the development of social and emotional skills.**

School districts in communities at high risk of COVID-19 outbreaks are opening the school year with full remote or hybrid learning models. Families are balancing supporting their children with work obligations and keeping food on the table and their households afloat. There is a tremendous need for safe spaces and resources for children to learn and develop during the school day so they can work.

The out-of-school time (OST) field stands ready to partner with the public-school districts in their communities to support students and families but must also operate extended hours at reduced capacity to adhere to safe social distancing guidelines. Robust public investments are needed, and United Way has never been better positioned to help, with our scale and decades of knowing what works, as well as what's needed immediately.

**\$15 million will support the current response of our 87 OST partners AND will enable United Way to help more than 65,000 youth and provide funding for programs to expand hours to support hybrid and remote school day instruction.**

- \$7.5M would provide 300 program sites with \$25,000 grants to support expanded hours, purchase materials to create socially distanced classrooms, hire additional staff to maintain low staff-to-student ratios, and purchase program supplies. These grants would support approximately 45,000 students.
- \$1M would support 2,000 youth with technology assistance, such as obtaining reliable internet and appropriate technology.
- \$2.5M would provide six months of cleaning supplies and PPE for 1,400 OST classrooms. This funding will provide a safe, sanitized learning environment for 18,200 youth.

## Ensuring Access to High-Quality Early Education

### Goal: \$15 million

**Our most vulnerable communities need access to reliable, high-quality early education, which is core to supporting the healthy development of young children while giving caregivers flexibility to work and pursue career development.** Last year, nearly 46,000 children across the state in need of childcare were not enrolled in licensed programs. United Way currently works with 53 early education and care partner organizations and like the OST sector, is the largest private funder of early childhood education in Massachusetts. **Last year, our network of agency partners provided 12,600 children with access high quality learning opportunities to promote healthy child development and lay a solid foundation for their education.**

**COVID has put early education -- already costly and underfunded -- in a perilous situation.** Since the onset of the pandemic, more than 270 childcare providers have closed, widening this gap even more. Only 71% of licensed early care programs are expected to reopen by December 31, 2020. In New Hampshire, half of the childcare centers may not survive the Covid-19 crisis. Early education center-based programs and family childcare providers must remain open to serve children and families.

**\$15M will support the current response of our network of 53 early education and care partners and enable United Way to help an additional 8,000 young children enroll in child care and connect with needed early childhood supports:**

- \$10M will provide scholarship funds to childcare partners in hotspot/gateway cities to support 5,000 children with \$2,000 scholarships. There are an estimated 45,000 children in need of early childhood care that currently do not receive it.
- \$1M will expand our innovative Shared Services model to fund stabilization grants and business training to 100 Family Child Care providers to prevent closures and help them to reopen. This funding will help serve 500-600 children.
- \$1M to expand DRIVE, an early childhood developmental screening program to hotspot/gateway communities. Funds will deploy parent screeners to increase screenings by 2,500 children to help identify developmental concerns and provide grants to early childhood support programs to serve those in need of early intervention.

## Establishing a Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fund

### Goal: \$2 Million

Racial and economic inequities are more glaring than ever. We have seen how the economic and health impacts of COVID-19 have hit communities of color disproportionately harder than the rest of our region. The rate of positive COVID-19 cases among Black and Latinx residents is 3x as high as the rate among white residents. For example, according to a recent survey by Mass Inc., 20% of Latinos in the workforce are unemployed and looking for work, per the survey, and about 35% said they have gotten food from a food bank.

We know the underlying conditions that have caused these disparities – low-wage jobs, crowded housing, and other social determinants — have racial injustice and discrimination at their root. United Way is committed to advancing racial justice and equity to empower our communities and mobilize volunteers and community leaders.

- **\$2M dollars would allow United Way to establish a Justice, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion fund for nonprofits that want to engage in deep work with their staff and communities yet lack the financial resources to do so.**

This work is about supporting systemic change at the organizational level and recognizes that DEI learning and growth is needed at all types of organizations. United Way is learning from leading diversity, equity and inclusion organizations and believes that change may look different depending on the needs that our nonprofit partners articulate for themselves. United Way's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council will refine the scope and activities of this fund over the next few weeks.