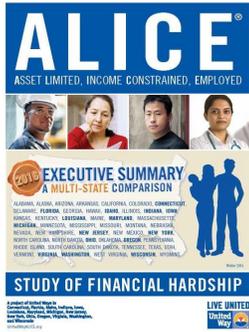


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ALICE report shows more struggling families

TaMarvyn Waters, Democrat staff writer Published 6:55 p.m. ET Feb. 22, 2017 | Updated 1:30 p.m. ET Feb. 23, 2017



(Photo: Courtesy of the United Way of Florida.)

Nearly every other person in Leon County is struggling to meet basic needs, from paying rent and childcare to buying clothes, United Way officials said Wednesday.

They're what the United Way calls ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained Employed. This population earns more than the federal poverty level — last updated in 1965 — but not enough to live and work in today's economy.

The nonprofit's 2017 ALICE report (http://unitedwayalice.org/documents/16UW%20ALICE%20Report_MultiStatesSummary_12.23.16_Lowres.pdf) includes a survival budget unique to Florida's 67 counties based on how residents can afford basic needs in their respective communities. Florida was one of 13 states that participated in the ALICE report.

The report's main takeaway — families are struggling despite being employed.

Brianna Bouie, 25, of Tallahassee, was a Walmart employee for eight months before she said she was laid off this month. She's single and raising three children ages 7, 5 and 1. Bouie said her mother is a godsend, but she's worried about how long she can last without a job.

"The toughest part is not being able to provide for them the way I was when I was working," said Bouie, who also receives child support.

Recently, her oldest son saw her in a blue shirt, similar to those worn by Walmart employees. He assumed she was going back to work. Bouie had to let him down easy.

"He said, 'Oh man, I want you to get money so you can buy things for when I'm good in school,'" Bouie said. "I feel bad but he understands. He knows that if I don't have it, we'll find a way to get it."

Too many local families are barely getting by, said Katrina Rolle, president and CEO of the United Way of the Big Bend.

"They're one paycheck away from catastrophe," Rolle said.

Households Below ALICE Threshold, Cities with More Than 75,000 Households, 2014

Largest Cities	Number of Households	Percentage of Households Below ALICE Threshold
New York, New York	3,148,067	49%
Indianapolis, Indiana	328,528	44%
Jacksonville, Florida	320,809	42%
Seattle, Washington	304,564	28%
Portland, Oregon	257,287	32%
Detroit, Michigan	253,490	70%
Baltimore, Maryland	238,897	45%
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	233,161	63%
Miami, Florida	158,039	66%
New Orleans, Louisiana	152,788	41%
Tampa, Florida	140,429	43%
Buffalo, New York	110,070	60%
Orlando, Florida	109,685	53%
Madison, Wisconsin	103,771	45%
St. Petersburg, Florida	103,519	40%
Fort Wayne City, Indiana	100,239	44%
Jersey City, New Jersey	98,873	40%
Baton Rouge, Louisiana	91,034	49%
Newark, New Jersey	89,182	62%
Spokane, Washington	85,300	43%
Boise City, Idaho	84,511	35%
Rochester, New York	83,944	69%
Des Moines, Iowa	81,779	40%
Tacoma, Washington	78,717	44%
Fort Lauderdale, Florida	75,205	47%
Tallahassee, Florida	75,058	50%

Source: American Community Survey 2014, and the ALICE Threshold

The United Way of Florida released United Way its 2017 ALICE report, which stands for Assisted Limited, Income Constrained Employed. This population earns more than the federal poverty level — last updated in 1965 — but not enough to live and work in today's economy. (Photo: Courtesy of the United Way of Florida)

She said the local United Way will use the report to educate employers about the ALICE population. She said there's a need to collaborate and iron out priorities to lift the population.

"We have to step into that reality and figure out how we're going to make a difference with that number," Rolle said. "That number is real, and we have to do something about it."

Four main factors are to blame for the large numbers of ALICE households: low-wage jobs, the basic cost of living, lack of savings and economic challenges.

For example, the report said the percent of jobs paying less than \$20 per hour ranged from 49 percent in Connecticut to 71 percent in Idaho. In Florida, it's 67 percent.

Lars Gilberts, statewide director for ALICE at the United Way of Florida, said this year's reports shows some areas, such as Orange County, thanks to a boost in tourism, have improved since the 2014 assessment, But, he said, thousands of families across the state are suffering even more than before the recession.

"Even though unemployment levels are down, there are a lot of people working near the edge," Gilberts said. "It's a mixed bag and the poverty level doesn't show that."

Also on Wednesday, United Way officials and legislative leaders held a press conference at the Capitol in support of an appropriation request (HB 2153) that would be a direct pipeline to ALICE households. The bill is requesting \$1.2 million for the United Way of Florida's Financial Literacy and Prosperity Program. It could help families receive their Earned Income Tax Credit, a refundable tax credit for residents earning low- to moderate incomes.

"Income is what you need to get by, but assets are what you need to get ahead," Gilberts said. "And these families are struggling on both counts."

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Highlights from the ALICE report:

- 41 percent of Leon County residents are struggling to meet basic needs. Surrounding counties: Gadsden (56 percent); Jefferson (49 percent); Taylor (55 percent); and Wakulla (39 percent).
- Of Tallahassee's 75,056 households, half of them fall below the ALICE threshold.
- Idaho and Florida have the highest percent of low-wage jobs (71 and 67 percent respectively).
- Low-wage jobs are expected to grow faster than higher-wage jobs over the next decade.
- Florida has one of the highest proportions of households below the ALICE threshold of the 13 states — 45 percent of the state's households can't afford bare-minimum survival budgets in their respective counties. Most were working, although 15 percent fell under the federal poverty level.

Ways to help ALICE households:

- Become a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) volunteer to help with taxes. This might also turn into a financial coaching relationship.
- Qualified residents can get their taxes prepared for free at the following locations: Smith-Williams Service Center (2295 Pasco St), Florida Blue (2116 Apalachee Parkway), Godby High School Academy of Finance (1717 W. Tharpe St.), CareerSource Capital Region (2601 Blair Stone Road Building C), FAMU School of Business and Industry (500 Gamble St.), Lively Technical Center (500 N. Appleyard Drive), Tallahassee-Leon Federal Credit Union (by appointment) and Florida Housing Finance Corporation 277 N. Bronough St. No. 5000). Call locations for details and appointment times.
- Become a ReadingPal or MathPal and get more involved with LCS to help parents strategize on their child's educational goals.
- Get involved with UWBB and/or our agency partners to learn more about the human service needs of our community.

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