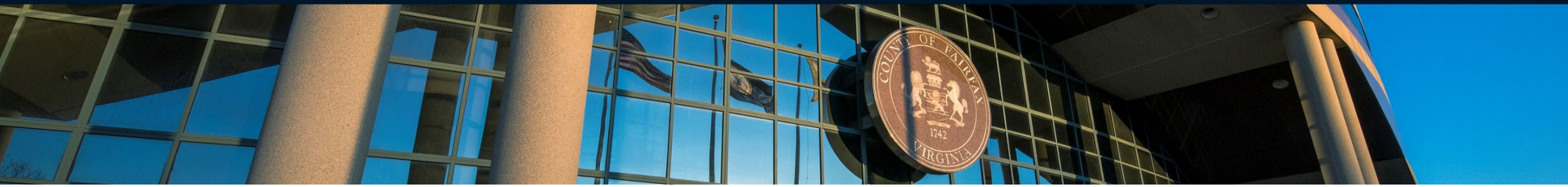
FAIRFAX COUNTY
VIRGINIA



The Fairfax County Economic Mobility Pilot Update

Preliminary Insights to Inform Upward Mobility Systems Change

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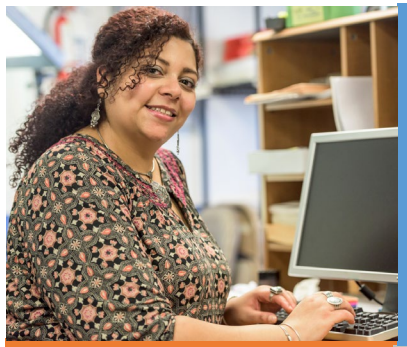
June 3, 2025

The Fairfax County Economic Mobility Pilot Overview

Fairfax County ECONOMIC MOBILITY PILOT

- Aligned with The Countywide Strategic Plan and One Fairfax
- Funded by ARPA and Human Services Innovation Fund
- Applied the definition of upward mobility — dignity & belonging, economic success, power & autonomy
- Evidence-based guaranteed income intervention to 180 eligible randomly selected households
- Cross-sector team including people with lived experienceBuilt on existing substructure of resources and partners



Asset Limited: Little to no savings; may not own a home or car; 1 emergency away from financial crisis



Income Constrained: Not enough income to cover the cost of living plus save for emergencies and their future



Employed: Working — sometimes multiple jobs—but still can't make ends meet



Fairfax County Runs On ALICE

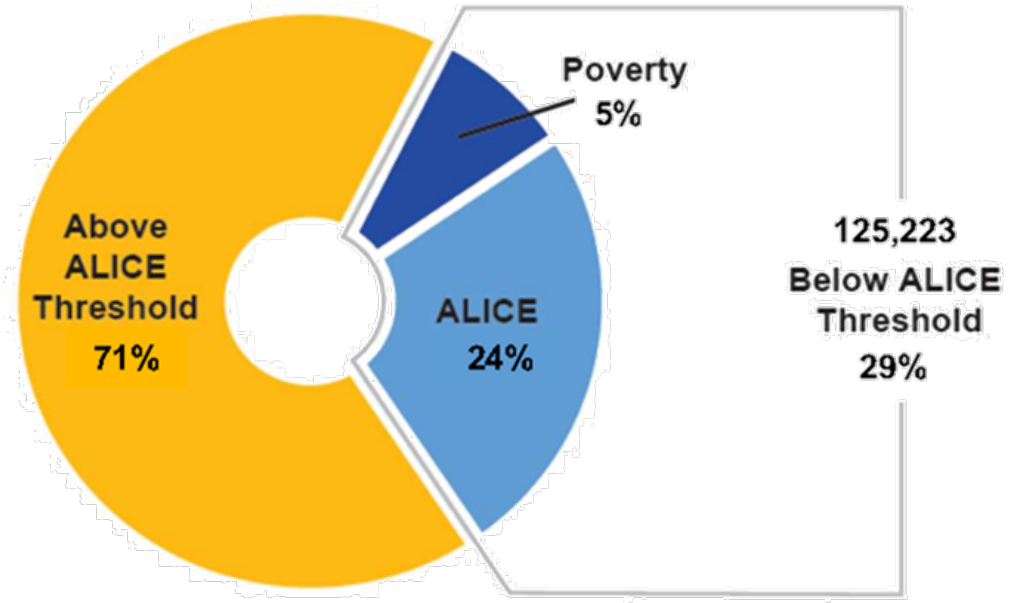
ALICE workers are the engine that makes our economy – and our daily lives – run smoothly



ALICE Lives in Fairfax County

Fairfax County Households in 2023 = 430,157

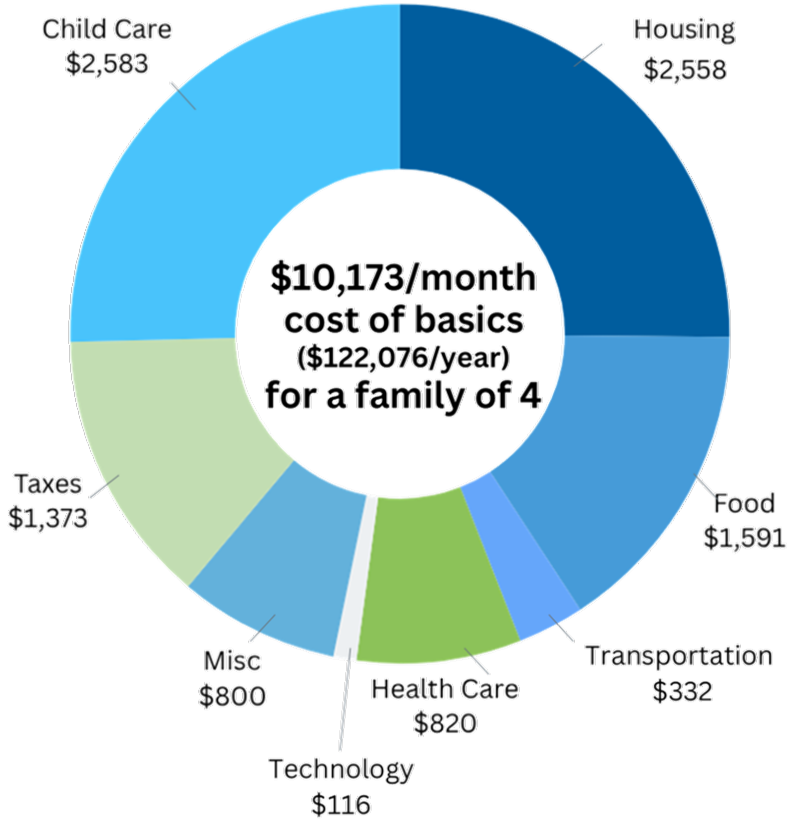
1 in 3 households* face financial instability despite working



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

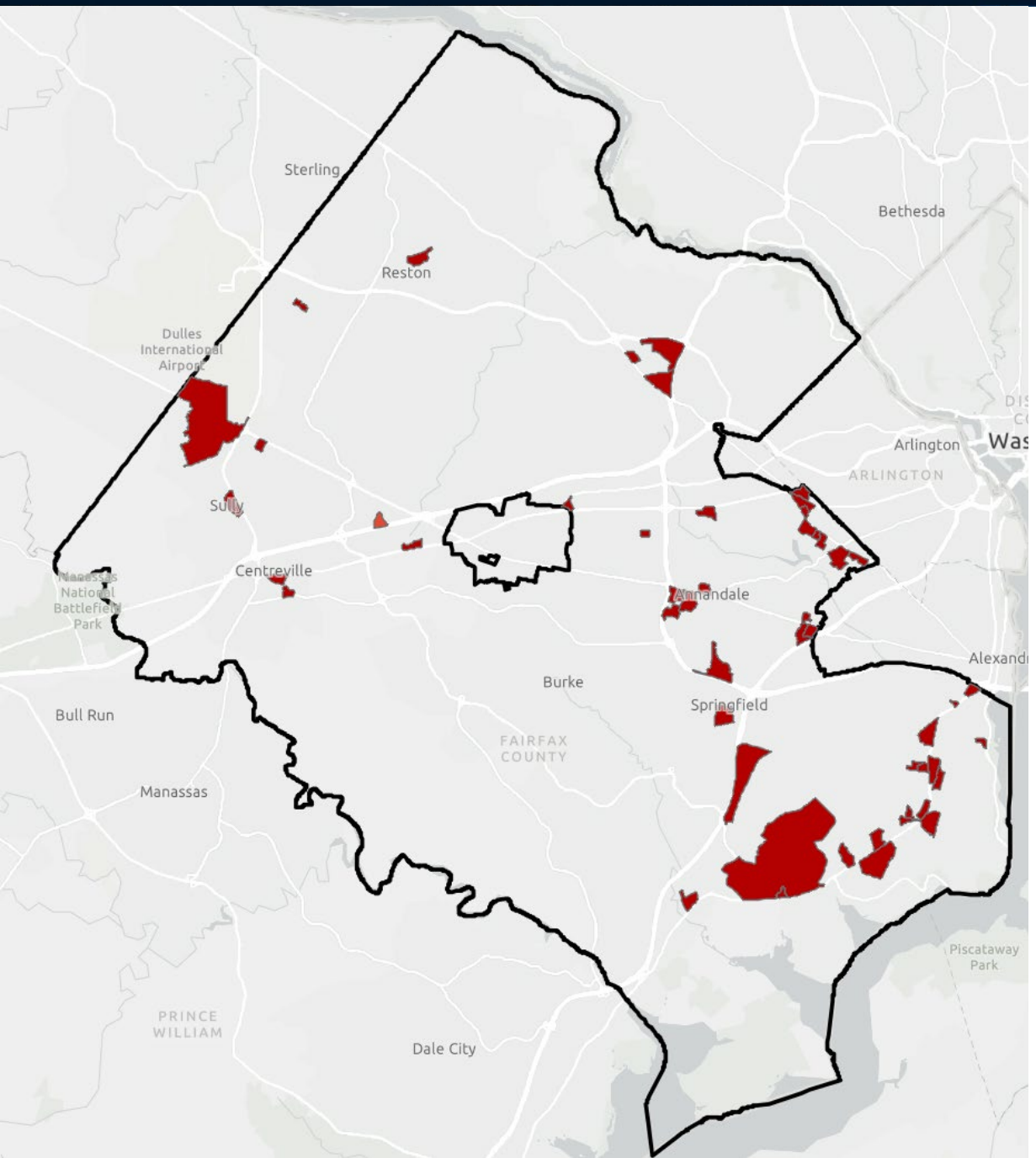
Stark Mismatch: Wages vs Basic Expenses

Over $3,000/month* income deficit for a family of 4



Cost of basic needs ($122,076/year) - average household income threshold ($86,028/year)*

Source: *ALICE 2023 Fairfax County | State of ALICE 2025 | United For ALICE®*
*Note: *Includes Fairfax County, Fairfax City, and Falls Church City*



The Uneven Economic Mobility & Opportunity Landscape in Fairfax County

Highest concentration (>58%) of households below ALICE threshold by block group*

Below ALICE Threshold = Poverty & ALICE

Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023
*Note: *Includes Fairfax County, Fairfax City, and Falls Church City*



Research & Evaluation Overview

- Assess the pilot's family, community, and system impacts
- Informs the County's upward mobility systems change strategies
- Three phases of survey data, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and community conversations:
  1. Beginning (onset of the pilot): October & November 2023
  2. Middle (6-8 months into the pilot): April & May 2024
  3. End of the pilot: April-June 2025
- Final Report: January 2026

Participant Voices

"There's many things – our kids didn't do soccer, and I would have loved if they could've, but it's really expensive…. we live in a place we can't really afford to live in. You know, just the way everything – how much things cost to do."



— Ben, Librarian, Master's Degree.
- *Supplements income with a gig job*
- *Wife works part-time*

"*I'm the head of household, a single mom, I have two kids, I only have one job and I can't work another one, I pay rent, for the car, and everything. … So, there's nothing left for anything else.*"



— Larissa, HR Rep for a large retailer
- *Single mother of 2*
- *Recently moved from a single room to an apartment*
- *Son works part-time to help pay rent*

"*I work and then go back to stay with the kids. Yeah, because we have two kids, we have to stay…Yeah, we got a little money and we spent everything for rent, for food. Nothing left… Nothing left.*"



— Esu, Retail Associate
- *Recent immigrant whose IT certification did not transfer to U.S.*
- *Wife works as part-time*
- *Alternate work schedules to care for young children -childcare too costly*

High Financial Precarity

At the start of the pilot:

Over 90% reported worrying about monthly expenses

86% reported an unexpected $400 bill would be highly impactful on their monthly expenses

Over 50% reported not being able to cover monthly expenses despite being employed

Research & Evaluation: Early Impacts

Meaningful Outcomes: At mid-point, the pilot has shown to be impactful in the lives of participants with measurable financial, health, family, and community improvements.

FINANCIAL STABILIZATION	• Increased ability to save, pay bills in full and on time, and pay off debt —'able to breathe' financially • Over a third reported improved credit score • Nearly 20% reported improved job situation or career skills
MOBILITY INVESTMENTS	• Investments in upward mobility for themselves and their children • Deepened support ties • 30% reported improved physical and mental health • Findings suggest increased self-efficacy
INCREASED PROSPERITY	• Less financial worry • New patterns of thinking of what is possible in the future • Sense of belonging in community and more volunteerism • 60% reported increased ability to financially support family and invest time/attend activities

Reimagining Systems to Boost Upward Mobility

Pilot aspects and learnings - a catalyst for rethinking HHS system:

- DFS Employment Services engaging differently to leverage resources and support job seekers
- Replicating cash distributions to persons who are unbanked in DFS Fostering Futures Program
- Reevaluating eligibility for non-mandated services
- Compensating people with lived experience
- Expanding NCS Economic Mobility Partners






Next Steps

- Conducting a deeper data analysis of ALICE: demographics, sub-populations, upward mobility challenges, and root causes
- Developing a cross-sector coalition to target interventions that address under-employment, credentialing, and purchasing power of ALICE
- Creating ALICE Lives in Fairfax County Awareness Campaign
- Spring 2026 Update to the HHS Committee:
  1. Research and Evaluation Final Report
  2. Action steps based on findings, positioning, and promising practices

Key FCEMP Partners

NCS

one FAIRFAX

Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services

United Way of the National Capital Area

FAIRFAX COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY SERVICES

Financial Empowerment Center at South County
UNITED WAY OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA

britepaths

College of Humanities and Social Sciences
CENTER FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
George Mason University

Questions?








Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Health & Human Services Committee

Fairfax County ECONOMIC MOBILITY PILOT