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**Public Programs Cut Child Poverty by More than Half, According to New Report on Poverty in Massachusetts**

***Report Commissioned by MASSCAP and Written by MassBudget Looks at “Obstacles on the Road to Opportunity: Finding a Way Forward Together”***

*Forum Looks at Impact of Public Programs on Poverty in Lawrence*

**Lawrence, Mass. – June 5, 2018** – Effective programs that help families to make ends meet, like the Earned Income Tax Credit, SNAP, fuel assistance, school lunches, Head Start, and Social Security cut the number of people in Massachusetts living in poverty by almost half and reduce the number of children living in poverty by more than half, according to a new report on poverty called “[Obstacles on the Road to Opportunity: Finding a Way Forward Together](#).” The report was commissioned by the Massachusetts Association for Community Action ([MASSCAP](#)) and written by Nancy Wagman, Kids Count Director of the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center ([MassBudget](#)).

“There are myths out there about whether or not public programs reduce the number of people living in poverty – this report shows that the programs that community action agencies administer help vulnerable residents of Massachusetts stay out of poverty,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP’s executive director. “But it also provides valuable data on the obstacles we see towards helping move others out of poverty.”

The study notes that while the incomes of the highest income households have grown considerably over the past several decades, the same cannot be said for low-wage workers. According to the study, “national economic policies stopped emphasizing wage growth, Congress allowed the real value of the minimum wage to decline, and labor law enforcement agencies weakened protections for workers.” The positive news is that well-resourced communities in Massachusetts can help to counteract these national trends by lowering the

barriers to opportunity. Still, communities with fewer resources and higher concentrations of poverty are challenged to help residents living in poverty.

“Lawrence is the most impoverished city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts – 27 percent of our residents live at or below the poverty – so it is especially important for us to understand the positive impact that public programs have,” said Evelyn Friedman, executive director of Greater Lawrence Community Action Council (GLCAC). “As a Community Action Agency, we are on the ground working alongside residents to promote economic stability and opportunity for children, families, seniors, people living with disabilities, and others who face the challenges of poverty. We are hopeful that this study will help us even more provide the kind of services our clients need.”

The report was discussed at a forum in Lawrence co-sponsored by GLCAC and the [United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley](#) along with MASSCAP, who commissioned the study as an update of findings that the [agency released in 2014](#). The Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF), who helped to underwrite the report, also participated. MASSCAP is the statewide association of 23 Community Actions Agencies (CAAs) operating in Massachusetts.

“Policies that help make work pay—such as the minimum wage and the earned income tax credit—and those that help people balance the demands of work and family—such as paid family and medical leave, earned paid sick days, and affordable child care—help working families find a way forward,” writes MassBudget’s Wagman in the report. “Policies that help families make ends meet—such as those that help put food on the table or provide other income supports—can help families through hard times. Policies that help communities thrive—such as those that support safe, healthy, and affordable housing, and that support high quality local education from the earliest days and into young adulthood—help give every child the best chance at a bright future.”

Dr. Lane A. Glenn, who is President of Northern Essex Community College, moderated a panel discussion at the event, which took place in Lawrence. In addition to highlighting the findings in the report, participants focused on the advocacy strategies that those working to end poverty should pursue. Subsequent forums will take place in Quincy in June, and in Worcester and Western Massachusetts in Fall 2018. The report was released in May at an event in Boston.

“United Way believes in creating positive, lasting change for people in need,” said Michael K. Durkin, President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. “The report and today’s event allow us to better understand the barriers that create income inequality so that we can focus awareness and resources on the most effective strategies and solutions. Together, we can fight to ensure individuals and families have access to safe, affordable housing, earn a wage that allows them to support themselves, help them manage their finances and build a future.”

This landmark report is underwritten by United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley along with The Boston Foundation, Cambridge Community Foundation, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, Eastern Bank, Essex County Community Foundation, Lowell Community Foundation, United Way of Pioneer Valley, and Worcester Community Action Council. You can read the findings [here](#) (executive summary [here](#)).

### **About MASSCAP**

The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) is a statewide association of the 23 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) operating in Massachusetts. Through the combined skills and vision of its members, MASSCAP works to enhance the ability of each agency to better serve its clients. We work with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and other state agencies to open doors to self-sufficiency for low-income Massachusetts residents.

### **About Community Action Agencies (CAAs)**

Community Action Agencies work to help our most vulnerable populations, especially the poor. Rooted in the communities we serve, we ensure that the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable are met. Our agencies provide basic social safety net services, including administration of services that help mothers and children afford nutritious food, assistance that prevents seniors from going cold in the winter, and centers that provide quality early child care to families. Last year, FY2017, CAAs helped more than 600,000 people in need.

We are also at the forefront of providing vulnerable populations with innovative services that help move individuals and families to economic independence. By employing thousands throughout the state, and by administering services whose funds create an important multiplier effect throughout communities, Community Action Agencies are important economic engines, especially in the Gateway cities of Massachusetts.