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

*Structural Challenges Persist: Income Inequality as High Ever*

*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 on the South Coast*

**Fall River, MA – October 11, 2019**– 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 hundreds of thousands of our vulnerable friends and neighbors in this state stay out of poverty,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP’s executive director. “But it also provides valuable data about the structural challenges that must be addressed to make the economy work for everyone.”

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.

“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.”

The report was discussed at a forum in Fall River at the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at UMass Dartmouth and sponsored by [Citizens for Citizens](#) (Fall River) and [People Acting in Community Endeavors](#), PACE (New Bedford), along with MASSCAP, who commissioned the study as an update of findings that the [agency released in 2014](#). MASSCAP is the statewide association of 23 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) operating in Massachusetts.

According to special guest, Congressman Joseph Kennedy III, “Eliminating poverty and strengthening our communities requires a collaborative approach that unites the non-profit, public and private sectors towards our shared goal. Working with CFC, PACE, MASSCAP and all Community Action Agencies allows us to confront economic inequality and pursue the policies that will lift up American workers. By supporting programs like CSBG and Fuel Assistance, we can help our neighbors in the Fall River area and create new economic opportunities throughout the region.”

In addition to highlighting the findings in the report, panel participants focused on the advocacy strategies that those working to end poverty should pursue with a focus on the unique needs on the South Coast, including the need for affordable, accessible, high quality child education and care. Panelists included Representative Patricia Haddad, Nicholas Christ, President and CEO of Baycoast Bank, Edward M. Lambert Jr., Executive Director, Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, Kerri Denault, Parent and Chair of PACE Head Start Policy Council, Jill Fox, Program Director, HeadStart, PACE, Pamela Wildnauer, and Program Director, HeadStart, CFC. The panel was moderated by John Vasconcellos, President, Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts.

“I am pleased to have taken part in this forum,” said Representative Haddad. “It is critical that we bring information about poverty and inequality to our region to understand the challenges people face and how we can create opportunity together. We must focus on accessible and affordable, quality early education and care as with that many opportunities open up for families and children. It is great to have Community



Action and other human service organizations working together with local and state officials and business to find solutions.”

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

### **About MASSCAP**

The Massachusetts Association of Community Action’s 23 private, non-profit human service and advocacy organizations work to administer key anti-poverty programs in every city and town in the Commonwealth. These organizations serve approximately 600,000 low-income people annually, more than half of them with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level.

For more than 50 years, Community Action Agencies have been on the front lines of addressing poverty -- administering federal programs, federal community services and community development grants, and state funds. CAAs are economic engines in cities and towns across Massachusetts, providing communities with an annual infusion of over \$500 million in total resources. CAAs generate at least twice that amount helping clients become self-sufficient and productive.