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## Report Looks at the Crossroads created by COVID-19

### Lessons Learned to Help Families Moving Along the Road to Opportunity in Massachusetts

**Boston, MA (February 3, 2022)** – Financial assistance during the pandemic such as expanded unemployment benefits, expansion and extension of the child tax credit, and additional SNAP benefits all contributed to direct reductions in poverty and racial disparities. The targeted benefits in federal COVID relief legislation have also shown a way towards cutting child poverty in half, according to our updated report on poverty and opportunity, [“At A Crossroads Created by COVID-19: Families Moving Along the Road to Opportunity in Massachusetts.”](#) The report outlines years of historic disinvestment, the current state of our Commonwealth, and strategic recommendations for moving forward. The report was commissioned by **MASSCAP** and written by **Nancy Wagman, Research & Kids Count Director, Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MassBudget)**.

“The report comes at an important time - as we emerge from the pandemic and are assessing its health, social, and economic effects which include exacerbating in an unprecedented way the challenges our vulnerable friends and neighbors face every day,” said Joe Diamond, Executive Director, MASSCAP. “The pandemic also set in sharp relief the urgent need to address structural issues that cause poverty such as racism and the wage gap. And, as we prepare to participate as member of the special commission to study poverty in the Commonwealth, the report will provide critical context for its work.”

The report notes over the past several decades, even though the economy continues to grow, wages, and benefits no longer keep up. Low wages mean that many workers need to work more than one job just to stay afloat. In addition, just as wages have stagnated, incomes have also flattened for all but people with the highest incomes. We see huge disparities in wealth in Massachusetts due to continued patterns of unequal access to education, jobs, and housing. There is observable income inequality across Massachusetts with family incomes overall varying by race as well as by geographic location. It is clear that median wages for Black and Latinx workers are lower than white workers, and that therefore, communities of color are more likely to have lower incomes than white communities. The pandemic only exacerbated these long-standing inequities.

The report reveals the increases in unemployment, food, and housing insecurity during the pandemic with a dramatic impact on Black and Latinx families and Gateway cities. “While anyone can catch COVID-19, the impact of the pandemic has not hit everyone equally,” says Nancy Wagman, Research & Kids Count Director at MassBudget. “It’s no coincidence that communities most affected by the pandemic are the same ones that have experienced decades of chronic disinvestment. We must be willing to use all the policy tools at our disposal to make sure we address these inequities. That is our roadmap forward to opportunity for everyone on the other side of this pandemic.”

“Our longstanding partnership with MassBudget has helped us to be more effective advocates for the people we serve. MassBudget’s research and insight is active context as we develop our outreach and public policy priorities each year,” pointed out Laura Meisenhelter, MASSCAP President and Executive Director, North Shore Community Action Program. “This report, among many things, highlights how providers of early education and care such as Community Action Agencies, were affected by the pandemic and the importance of early education and care is as we recover.”

We have seen COVID relief legislation bring relief, but we know that further investments at the state and local level are needed to reach those who need it the most. Building on what we have learned, investing in expanded unemployment benefits, extensions of the Earned Income Tax and Child Tax Credits, and additional SNAP benefits as well as investments in jobs and education are critical to the way forward.

#### 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 economically stable and mobile.

[Read the full report.](https://www.masscap.org/) For more information, please visit <https://www.masscap.org/>.

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