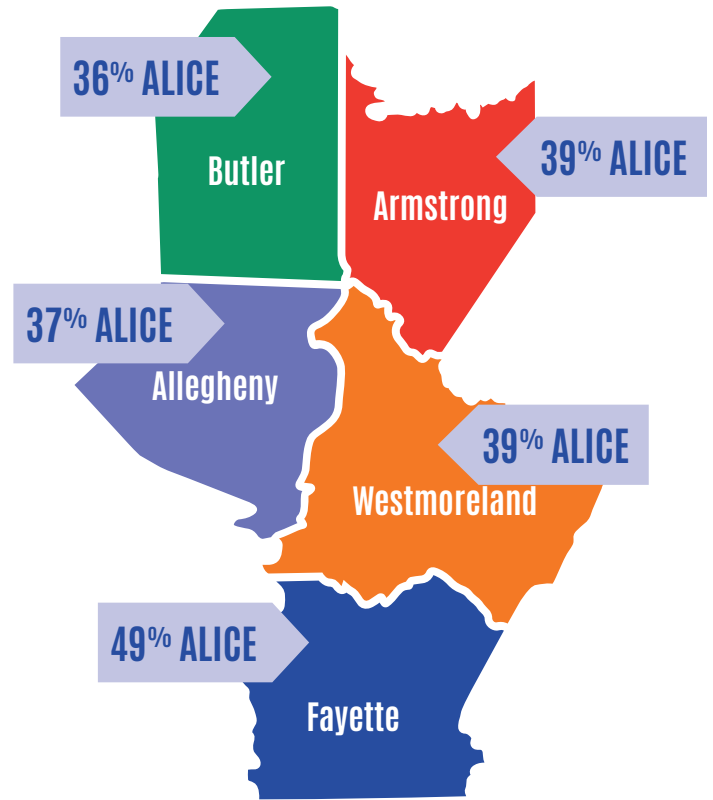


# POLICY AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

## SPRING 2026

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania invests more than \$30 million each year in human services to help our region thrive. Yet, affordability concerns are increasingly challenging for working families and the nonprofits that serve them.

According to United Way's latest **ALICE** (asset limited, income constrained, employed) report, 38% of families in our five-county region do not earn enough to meet their basic needs. We've set an aspirational goal of lifting 6,600 households above the ALICE threshold by 2027. These are the policy and advocacy priorities that will help us achieve this goal.



## BIG IDEAS: OUR POLICY AGENDA IS ORGANIZED AROUND THREE PRIORITIES.

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Positioning 211 as an innovative partner to state and local government, connecting people easily and effectively to services so that individuals and families can thrive.



Support families and help households grow their potential to earn.



Help workers attain and retain employment and remain on track when a crisis occurs.

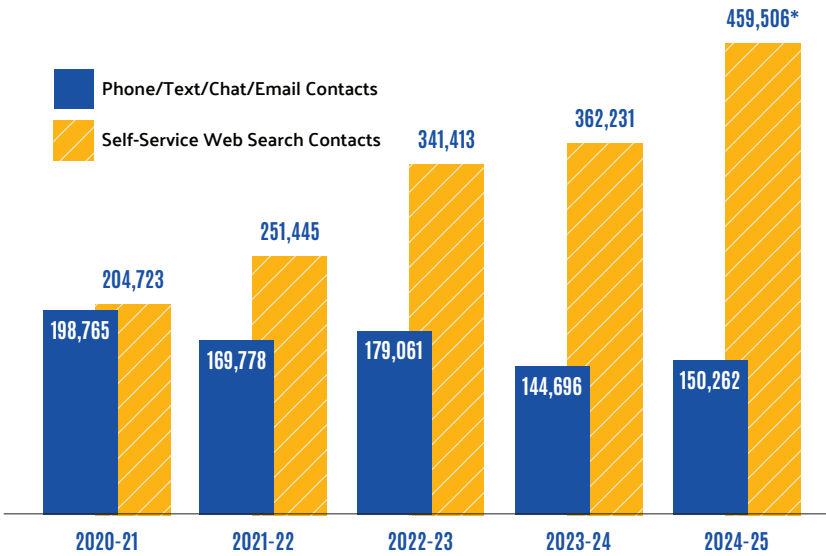
# PUBLIC POLICY ROADMAP: SPECIFIC CHANGES WE SUPPORT.

## POSITIONING 211 AS AN INNOVATIVE PARTNER

**Positioning 211 as an innovative partner to state and local government that connects people easily and effectively to services so that individuals and families can thrive.** PA 211 Southwest is the Commonwealth’s premier human services contact center, connecting Pennsylvanians 24/7/365 to human services agencies in their communities. Real people answer the calls and texts, providing an empathetic ear and helping people find local resources to meet their basic needs.

- **PA 211 has repeatedly demonstrated its effectiveness.** It was the central call to action for people who needed food resources during the recent SNAP benefits freeze. We were also the hub for information and vaccine scheduling during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **PA 211 Southwest has seen contact volume increase every year.** It costs about \$4 million annually to run our contact center.

- **Needs are increasing.** In 2025 across Pennsylvania, food-related needs increased by 63% from 2024. Over the past 10 years, funding remained flat at \$750,000 despite rising costs due to increased contact volume and operational demands on the 211 system.
- **Gov. Shapiro’s proposed FY 2026 PA budget includes increasing PA 211 funding from \$750,000 to \$1 million annually.** We are grateful for this vital increase and will continue to advocate for an annual allocation of at least \$2.5 million to ensure that 211 has the capacity to rise to growing demand and not be forced to reduce operating hours or serve fewer counties.



\*Projection based on 2024-25 FY web search data.

# SUPPORT FAMILIES AND HELP HOUSEHOLDS GROW THEIR POTENTIAL TO EARN.

United Way's ALICE report finds that a family of four in Pennsylvania with two children in child care must earn **\$83,544 a year to afford basic needs**. Lower-income families spend their dollars locally on groceries, housing, transportation and child care, which also benefits the entire economy. We support these policy actions to increase affordability and financial stability for working families:

- **A win: the Working Pennsylvanians Tax Credit.** United Way successfully advocated for a state-level earned income tax credit to supplement federal EITC dollars and provide an average benefit of around \$600 per household. Opportunity remains to increase this credit to further benefit families. Some legislators refer to this now as the ALICE tax credit.
- **Create a Pennsylvania Child Tax Credit to benefit families with children.** A refundable tax credit will build on the success of the federal EITC and Working Pennsylvanians Tax Credits and lift more families out of ALICE.
- **Fully fund food insecurity programs to ensure that people can afford the nutrition needed to succeed at school and work.** Contacts to 211 related to food soared before and during the fall 2025 halt to the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP). United Way advocates for increased permanent state and federal support for SNAP, food banks and the local farmers who supply them, for school-based nutrition programs that fight food insecurity and for alerting SNAP recipients to recertify so they do not lose benefits.
- **Continue support for the United Way's Free Tax Prep Coalition. With funding from the IRS, United Way's Free Tax Preparation Coalition prepares thousands of tax returns for households earning less than \$70,000.** Volunteers help households fully claim Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credits, which can total 50% of yearly income. Since 2009, the Coalition has filed 129,000 returns free for taxpayers, saving \$29 million in tax prep fees and generating \$212 million in refunds, which are then reinvested in the local economy.



# HELP WORKERS ATTAIN AND RETAIN EMPLOYMENT AND REMAIN ON TRACK WHEN A CRISIS OCCURS

Earning a living wage and having the tools to build wealth helps Pennsylvanians fulfill their potential and get on a path to financial freedom. United Way supports policies that ensure that workers with caregiving duties do not have to choose between employment and caring for family members or themselves. In addition to our own investments in workforce readiness and training programs, United Way advocates for the following policy priorities:

- **Support the Pennsylvania Family Care Act:** Businesses and their employees cannot go at it alone. United Way urges local and state governments to create and support family medical leave for workers who must care for family members and themselves during a crisis. Even if paid leave is not an option for small businesses, protection is needed so that ALICE workers have reliable work to return to after a crisis.
- **Minimum wage increase:** While an increase in the state minimum wage doesn't guarantee that low-income workers will move out of ALICE, it is a step towards a household sustaining wage. United Way urges local and state governments to support legislation to raise the minimum wage to at least \$15/hour by 2029.
- **Reduce the child care assistance benefits cliff.** Pennsylvania House Bill 1108 is a bipartisan effort that provides a pathway to financial stability by ensuring families continue receiving child care subsidies by paying a higher co-pay when they secure a raise or accept a promotion that increases their earnings above government limits.

**\$1 +  = \$2 FOR SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA**

United Way offers significant returns on investment, according to a 2024 PwC economic impact study. Every \$1 invested by United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania yields \$2 in economic impact for the region. PwC found that our activities supported 581 local jobs, generated \$34.7 million in labor income and added \$65.4 million to regional GDP.