



2019
PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA



We are the Uniters.

We bring people together to solve problems.

Thriving Communities

start with

Thriving Families

Our mission at United Way is to create positive, lasting change for people in need. One way we do this is by advocating for policies that help the people we serve. This work has led to tangible, positive outcomes, including an increase in affordable housing, funding for early education programs, and permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals.

United Way of Massachusetts Bay has set bold policy goals to improve the well-being of individuals and families in the communities we serve. Over the next two years, we will focus on the four key issues that align with our community impact work:

- **ENDING HOMELESSNESS**
- **MOVING FAMILIES OUT OF POVERTY**
- **SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN**
- **PREPARING YOUTH FOR SUCCESS**

Public policy advocacy can change lives. It magnifies the impact of nonprofit work, encourages volunteerism, and raises awareness of effective, vital social programs in the Commonwealth.

In advocating for these priorities, we hope to raise awareness with policy makers and constituents about what's working, with the ultimate goal of creating opportunities for lasting change.

We believe **all individuals**
and **families** should have
safe, stable homes
and the resources to keep them long term.



Ending Homelessness

On any given night in Massachusetts, more than 3,700 families are experiencing homelessness. And 60% of the individuals in those families are children.

Living conditions in neighborhoods and communities have a profound effect upon the ability of children and families to thrive. United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley helps fund programs that are working effectively, and we're creating new solutions where we see gaps.

Our goals include stabilizing individuals and families in safe, affordable housing with long-term support, and investing in and piloting innovative programs that can be rolled out statewide. These solutions include Homestart Renew Collaborative, Pay for Success, and Project Rise.

For 2019–2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to consider these initiatives:

1. **EXTEND PAY FOR SUCCESS.** Extend the existing Pay for Success partnership to achieve functional zero for chronically homeless individuals.
2. **PREVENT EVICTIONS.** Increase funding to support upstream eviction prevention through the Tenancy Preservation Program and Rent Arrearage Assistance Program, and support a right to counsel in eviction proceedings.
3. **TRANSFORM EMERGENCY SERVICES.** Examine how services get delivered to families experiencing homelessness with the Emergency Assistance Reprourement process — so families can be on the right path to affordable, permanent housing.
4. **EXPAND HOMELESS EDUCATION INITIATIVES.** Increase state investments in innovative programs that support students experiencing homelessness and housing instability through structured partnerships between public school districts and communities that support the entire family, such as United Way's RISE initiative or the City of Boston's Family-Led Stability Pilot.



*At United Way,
we believe*
every family
deserves
**financial
stability.**



Moving Families Out of Poverty

For many families, few options exist when living on the edge of financial catastrophe. United Way is changing that. During this legislative session, we'll be working hard to help families increase savings, reduce debt, improve credit and increase their earning potentials—so they don't ever have to choose between filling a fridge or filling a prescription.

For 2019–2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to consider these initiatives:

- 1. A WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH.** Create a special commission to make recommendations on implementing a whole family (also known as a two-generational) approach to service delivery which targets the needs of vulnerable parents and children together.
- 2. HELP RENTERS BUILD CREDIT.** Establish a rent reporting pilot program which creates a mechanism for tenants to build their credit profiles through on-time rent payments to consumer reporting agencies.
- 3. CONTINUE TO INCREASE THE STATE EITC.** Increase the state earned income tax credit (EITC) from the current 30% to 50% of the federal EITC.
- 4. PROTECT CHILDREN IN FAMILIES.** Adopt policies that allow families to thrive and achieve upward economic mobility, such as modifying the current renter's tax deduction, expanding access to child care, mitigating cliff effects, and increasing support for eviction prevention.
- 5. SUPPORT FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY.** Extend the MassLEAP Program or other programs like it, which provide supportive services to help residents in state-assisted housing developments to achieve a family-sustaining income.
- 6. LIFT THE CAP ON KIDS.** Repeal a state law that denies a child \$100 a month in benefits plus an annual \$300 clothing allowance if the child was conceived while the family was receiving welfare.
- 7. FOCUS ON MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS.** Ensure increased funding and resources for community-based mental health for both adults and children, as well as substance use disorder prevention and recovery and treatment programs to address these epidemics.

*We believe that all
young children
should enter school on a
path to succeed,
and that to do this, we must
move the entire family
forward together.*



Supporting Young Children

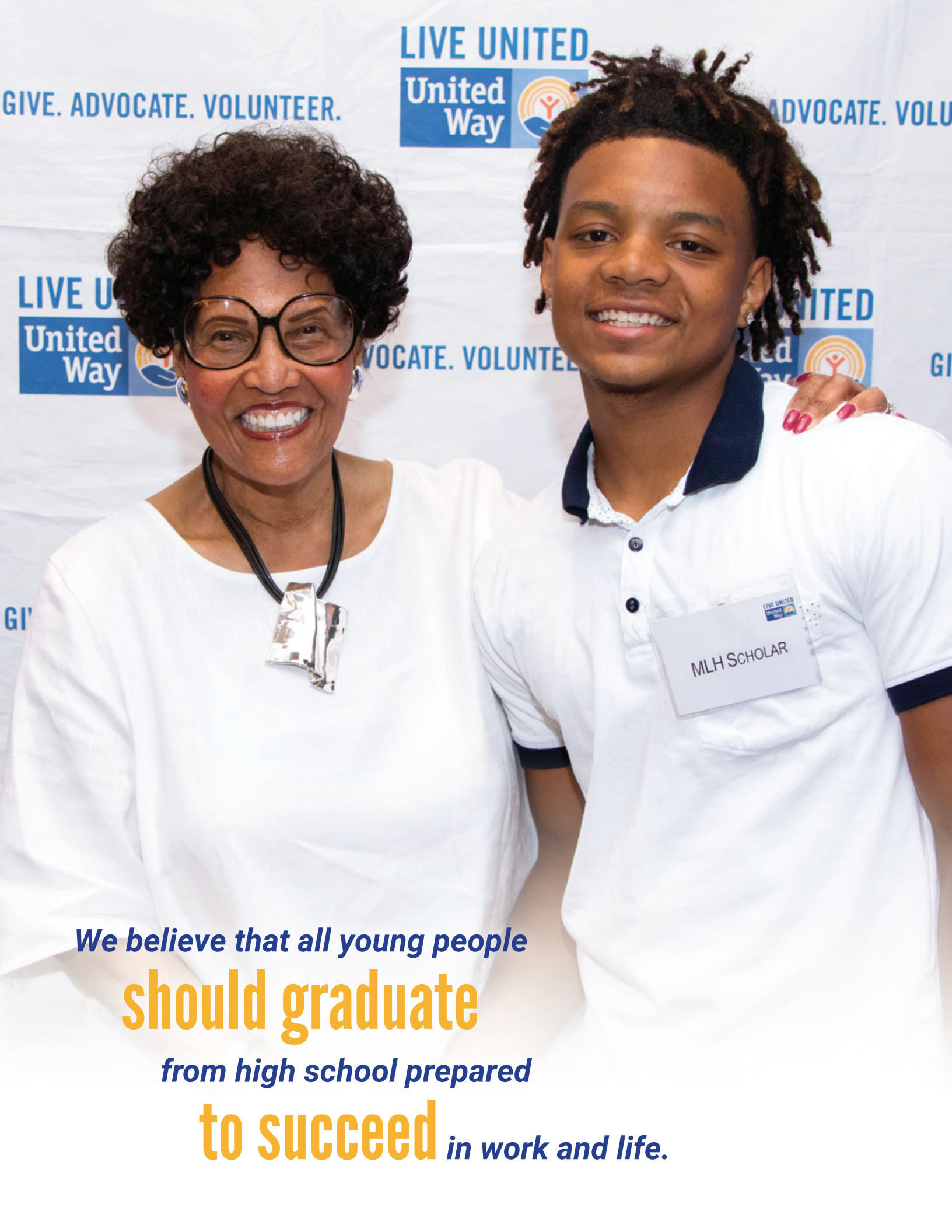
A child's first five years of life are the most critical time for brain development, but 33% of Massachusetts children enter kindergarten unprepared to learn - and they may never catch up. Unless they can read at grade level by third grade, these kids are four times less likely to graduate from high school.

Our solution involves the whole family, allowing parents to work and their young children to develop successfully, by:

- Expanding access to high-quality early education programs that promote early literacy and social skills.
- Giving parents/caregivers the resources to engage with children to support healthy development, including optional tools to screen for developmental delays.
- Scaling a two-generational, whole family model that enables parents to work and children to thrive.

For 2019–2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to consider these initiatives:

1. **EXPAND EARLY LEARNING.** Advocate to make high-quality, affordable early-learning opportunities available to all kids by expanding preschool beginning with high-needs communities that are ready with a state-approved expansion plan, creating early-learning opportunities for an estimated 10,000 additional 3- and 4-year-olds.
2. **ENCOURAGE A SHARED SERVICES MODEL.** Adopt legislation that requires the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to study and report on the feasibility of implementing a shared services model state-wide.



*We believe that all young people
should graduate
from high school prepared
to succeed in work and life.*



Preparing Youth For Success

Despite having one of the highest academic rankings in the nation, Massachusetts falls short when it comes to students from low-income neighborhoods. Students from low-income families demonstrate proficiency in math and reading at roughly half the rate of their more affluent peers. In addition to the academic achievement gaps, many underfunded schools lack the resources to focus on building social and emotional skills such as teamwork, problem solving, empathy, resiliency, and self-control.

Competence in these areas has been linked to higher academic performance, more positive self-image, and fewer behavioral and substance misuse issues down the road. Low-income students also have fewer opportunities to spend time learning outside of school in safe, supportive environments that allow them to build relationships with caring adults and their peers. These social and emotional skills and competencies are predictive of success in school and careers.

For 2019-2020, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to consider these initiatives:

- 1. CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP.** For low- and middle-income districts, adopt a foundation budget formula that properly accounts for the actual costs faced by schools. The lowest-wealth districts collectively spend 32% less on regular classroom teachers than dictated in the foundation budget, our state definition of adequate spending. That can mean significantly larger class sizes and fewer specialties like advanced coursework and the arts.
- 2. ENCOURAGE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL).** Enact policies that create a better understanding of the importance of SEL skills and encourage strategies to improve these skills.
- 3. PROMOTE OUT-OF-SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES.** Ensure access to quality out-of-school-time opportunities, including statewide expansion of programming throughout the summer.

Federal Priorities

As New Englanders, we have great love for our neighborhoods, cities, and towns. There is plenty to celebrate and we have many reasons to be proud. Even so, sometimes change needs to come from the top.

For 2019–2020, we urge federal lawmakers to consider these initiatives:

1. EVERYONE COUNTS. Ensure a fair and accurate Census 2020 count. This data influences federal funding, infrastructure and government representation. When we don't collect adequate census data, it has serious consequences for our communities and our nation – with many of those consequences lasting for at least 10 years. If there had been an accurate count in 2010, there would have been \$550 million more per year for health, education and financial stability programs benefiting children and young people.

2. IMMIGRANT ECONOMIC SUCCESS. Support the Massachusetts Business Coalition on Immigration, led by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition, which is committed to strengthening and advocating for state and federal investments to support the economic integration of foreign-born workers.

3. AMERICORPS. Protect funding for the Corporation for National Service (CNS). In 2019, CNS awarded \$61.3 million in federal grants to 26 organizations based in Massachusetts. Those funds are supporting over 6,600 AmeriCorps members in their efforts to tackle some of the toughest problems in the Commonwealth including early childhood education, support for English Language Learners students, and job-readiness programs.

4. UNIVERSAL CHARITABLE DEDUCTION. Fight for charities by supporting efforts to restore charitable giving incentives to millions of Americans. The federal tax reform legislation decreased the incentive for tax filers to itemize by increasing the standard deduction, eliminating the ability for millions of taxpayers to claim the charitable tax deduction. Of the 45 million taxpayers who itemized before this new law, 36 million claimed the charitable deduction, which accounts for an estimated 82% of charitable giving. Fewer charitable donations means fewer resources to fund private food banks, homeless or domestic violence shelters, provide day care, or job training and will damage the very fabric of the charitable sector and our communities.

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Join our advocacy efforts! Sign up to receive United Way's public policy alerts to stay informed about our priorities and the ways that you can help.

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For questions, please contact Khushbu Webber, Public Policy Director.



United Way of
Massachusetts Bay
and Merrimack Valley