

Executive Summary: Fact Sheet on Strategies for Furthering Family and Individual Self Sufficiency in Maryland

In 2021, the League of Women Voters of Maryland voted to establish a committee to “examine ways that Maryland can ensure its residents have enough income for at least the basics of food, shelter, healthcare, transportation, and childcare.” This document summarizes the committee’s findings.

Large shares of residents struggle to meet basic needs, including households that include workers who aren’t paid enough to cover costs of living, and whose earnings may nonetheless disqualify them from receiving public benefits.

About 1/3 of Maryland households experience this kind of instability. They are disproportionately:

- Workers with fewer educational credentials
- Black families
- Headed by people younger than 25
- Headed by single women with children

The Living Wage Study Committee concurs with the National League of Women Voters’ position that U.S. policy should “promote self-sufficiency” and ensure “income and/or services sufficient to meet...basic needs” for all people.

The Committee recommends that to achieve these goals through policy advocacy, State and local League members review and discuss methods for measuring what is necessary to meet basic needs, and the types of policies historically employed to guarantee standard of living.

Measures of Necessity

- [Official Poverty Measure](#) (federal poverty standard) – used to determine eligibility for federal benefits programs, based primarily on inflation-adjusted cost of food
- [Supplemental Poverty Measure](#) – developed to address limitations of Official Poverty Measure, based on survey data about household expenditures
- [Self Sufficiency Standard](#) – calculated for 400 family types and specific geographies, accounts for taxes owed and tax credits
- [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#) – market-based calculations for 12 family types and specific geographies, doesn’t allow for savings or any discretionary spending
- [United for ALICE](#) – focuses on Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households, seeks to identify needs gap unmet by combination of income after taxes and benefits

Government Initiatives to Meet Basic Needs

Government interventions to ensure minimum standard of living fall into three categories: wage policies, tax relief, and assistance programs. All of these initiatives have had some positive effects.

Intervention	Examples	Best Features	Limitations
Wage Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum wage • Prevailing wage requirements for government contractors 	May apply broadly and help many workers; may encourage/ incentivize higher voluntary pay offers	Full time work at minimum wage may not meet basic needs; federal minimum wage policy isn't inflation-adjusted
Tax Relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earned Income Tax Credit • Child Tax Credit 	Provide largest source of federal cash assistance program for lower-income families; pandemic-era expansion very successful in reducing poverty	Mostly provide support for working and tax-filing families and may not be available to all people struggling with meeting basic needs
Assistance Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplemental Security Income • SNAP (food stamps) • Medicaid • Universal basic income • One-time stimulus payments 	Meet a wide range of human needs; include cash and in-kind benefits; research shows assistance programs don't discourage participation in workforce	People with some income but not enough to meet needs may face absolute ineligibility for assistance; programs form a complex web and difficulty of navigating bureaucracy limits access