



## NEWS

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### **COST OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY** **CONTINUES TO RISE**

#### **Crittenton Women's Union releases updated costs and sets agenda to address gaps**

*Single parent of two in North Adams needs to earn an hourly wage of \$20.94 just to make ends meet*

Boston—Crittenton Women's Union (CWU) today released its latest Self-Sufficiency Standard for North Adams, which shows that in 2006, the cost to live in North Adams for a family of three – single parent, preschooler and school age child – was \$44,229 annually, up from \$34,875 in 2003 (when the previous self-sufficiency report was released), an overall increase of 21%. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is calculated for a variety of family types, including two-parent families.

The report makes clear the challenges a growing number of Massachusetts residents face in making ends meet, with the Commonwealth continuing to have one of the highest costs of living in the nation. The increase in costs is led by health care and child care, with healthcare costs alone escalating 35% in North Adams. The Self-Sufficiency Standard, a measure of the true costs of living, working and raising a family in Massachusetts, was released through CWU's Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (MassFESS), an unprecedented partnership between labor, community, business and government.

In order to support her family without public or private assistance, a working single mother in a North Adams family of three would need to earn \$3,686 per month or an hourly wage of \$20.94. That number is almost three times the current Massachusetts minimum wage of \$7.50/hour. The monthly cost of health care has jumped to \$321 from \$209, while child care costs have risen to \$1,207 from \$942.

"The Self-Sufficiency Standard is more important now than ever," said Elisabeth (Beth) D. Babcock, President/CEO of Crittenton Women's Union. "We see the Standard as a concrete, measurable way to guarantee the long-term economic viability of the region. If we want to ensure that women and their families actually do move up and out of poverty, we need to make investments in education and training so that more Massachusetts residents can work toward the all-important goal of economic independence. That's simply good business and good for the economy of the Commonwealth," she added.

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To help close the gap for the many women in North Adams who are struggling to make ends meet, Crittenton Women’s Union is focusing its efforts in three key areas: housing, child care and employment. By researching and promoting “hot jobs”—high demand jobs for women that pay self-sufficiency wages and require no more than two years of post-secondary training or education, CWU is encouraging state and federal governments to make investments in the kinds of educational and technical training programs that will help women in the Commonwealth secure and succeed at family-sustaining jobs.

In addition, CWU is working with other advocacy groups and the state to secure more housing and childcare assistance, to lift some of the burden from low-income women and keep them on the path to self-sufficiency.

“The Federal Poverty Guideline, \$16,600 annually for a family of three, is woefully inadequate, and eligibility for federal and state programs is often based on that number,” says Al Bashevkin of the Northern Berkshires Community Coalition. “Even though many of these families are not considered ‘poor’ according to the federal poverty measure, their incomes are inadequate to meet their basic needs.”

To help families and others make meaningful decisions about their lives and careers, CWU has launched an interactive self-sufficiency ‘calculator’ on its website ([www.liveworkthrive.org](http://www.liveworkthrive.org)), where anyone in Massachusetts can search for their town and family type to determine costs for a particular region of the Commonwealth.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates basic living costs such as housing, food, health care, child care, transportation, miscellaneous items (clothing, household supplies), and taxes. Unlike the Federal Poverty Guideline, the Standard accounts for differences in family size and configuration, geographic cost variations and the impact of taxes and tax credits. First released by The Women’s Union in 1998 and updated in 2003, the Standard provides a measurable tool that can be used to create, implement and evaluate sound educational and economic policy.

Developed through a partnership between Crittenton Women’s Union and Wider Opportunities for Women, the current and two previous reports were authored by Diana Pearce, PhD, economic researcher at the University of Washington and former Director of the Women and Poverty Project of Wider Opportunities for Women.

Crittenton Women’s Union offers education and training programs, housing, family support services, research into job trends, and advocacy to shape public policy and bring women and their families to economic independence. The Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (MassFESS) was launched in 1998, bringing together a broad coalition of organizations to reshape public policy on education and training in Massachusetts, leading to economic self-sufficiency for all families. For more information, visit [www.liveworkthrive.org](http://www.liveworkthrive.org).

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