ALICE IN BUFFALO COUNTY
2018 Point-in-Time Data

Population: 13,167 • Number of Households: 5,713
Median Household Income: $57,134 (state average: $60,773)
Unemployment Rate: 2.1% (state average: 3.2%)
ALICE Households: 21% (state average: 23%) • Households in Poverty: 10% (state average: 11%)
Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018

How has the number of ALICE households changed over time?
ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county (the ALICE Threshold). While conditions improved for some households from 2010 to 2018, many continued to struggle, especially as wages failed to keep pace with the cost of household essentials (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a basic smartphone plan).

What types of households are struggling?
In the past few decades, there have been major shifts in household composition. The share of American adults who have never been married is at a historic high, as is the number of senior households. There is also a growing number of people who live alone or with roommates, and an increasing share of grown children who live with their parents. Yet all types of households continue to struggle: ALICE and poverty-level households exist across all of these living arrangements.

Households by Income, Buffalo County, 2010 to 2018

Household Income by Household Type, Buffalo County, 2018

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2010-2018; American Community Survey, 2010-2018
Why do so many households struggle?

The cost of household basics outpaces wages...

The Household Survival Budget reflects the bare minimum cost to live and work in the modern economy and includes housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology (a smartphone plan), and taxes. It does not include savings for emergencies or future goals like college or retirement. In 2018, household costs were well above the Federal Poverty Level of $12,140 for a single adult and $25,100 for a family of four.

..and the labor landscape is challenging for ALICE workers

A breakdown of the labor force shows a small portion of adults (16 years and older) who were unemployed and a large number who were working in 2018. However, a significant portion of full- and part-time workers were paid by the hour; these workers were more likely to have fluctuations in income and less likely to receive benefits. There was also a high number of workers outside of the labor force (people who are not employed and not looking for work), which helped keep wages low: When more workers are available, employers have less incentive to raise wages to attract employees.

Labor Status, Population 16 and Over, Buffalo County, 2018

Note: Data for full- and part-time jobs is only available at the national level; these national rates (51% of full-time workers and 75% of part-time workers paid hourly) have been applied to the total county workforce to calculate the breakdown shown in this figure. Full-time represents a minimum of 35 hours per week at one or more jobs for 48 weeks per year.

Sources: American Community Survey, 2018; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2018