

OP-ED

More than half of Miamians cannot afford basic needs. We're taking action | Opinion

By Symeria Hudson

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View of the Miami Skyline and PortMiami. A United Way report finds that more than half of Miamians cannot afford basic needs. Pedro Portal pportal@miamiherald.com

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When we discuss economic hardship in America, it's easy to reduce the crisis to charts and percentages. But behind every number in the 2025 United Way ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Report are families: cashiers working long shifts, childcare providers shaping young minds and essential workers juggling multiple jobs to keep food on the table.

The national report shows a staggering 42% of U.S. households fell below the ALICE Threshold, the lowest income level a household needs to cover essential expenses. In Miami-Dade County, that number rises to 54%, meaning more than half of working families are in poverty or unable to afford the basics. In response, United Ways across the country are coming together to confront this reality and advance solutions that provide families with stability and opportunity.

That is why this moment matters. Miami is the right place to host the 2026 National ALICE Summit, where more than 700 leaders from corporate, government, nonprofit, healthcare and philanthropy sectors, representing communities in more

In Miami, the reality is sobering.

More than half a million households in Miami-Dade struggle to afford necessities such as housing, food, healthcare, childcare, transportation and technology. The gap between what families earn and what it truly costs to live continues to widen. The median household income is about \$72,000, while a family of four needs nearly \$90,000 just to cover basic costs.

Miami-Dade County is now among the most rent-burdened communities in the nation, with many families spending far too much of their income just to keep a roof over their heads, leaving little for transportation, food or savings. These challenges are not abstract. When families are forced to choose between paying rent and feeding their children, it is not an individual failure, but a systemic one.

United Way Miami is taking action, advancing policies and investments grounded in data and collaboration, including:

- Advocating for funding to ensure students within Florida's ALICE population have access to year-round nutritious meals.
- Expanding the nationally recognized work of our Center for Excellence in Early Education.
- Investing in underserved neighborhoods to strengthen local systems of support.
- Advancing zoning and land-use reforms to increase attainable and supportive housing.
- Creating real career pathways through UpSkill Miami, so families not only survive, but thrive.

These are not abstract ideas. They are policy-driven, community-informed solutions developed in partnership with local leaders across sectors. Let's be clear: no organization can close the gap alone. It takes business leaders, policymakers, educators, health systems, nonprofits and everyday citizens to rewrite the economic story of our region.

Miami's role in this national movement reflects both our challenge and our opportunity to lead. We are a global city with boundless creativity and innovation, yet we are also a frontline community where economic pressure is felt most acutely.

The data is clear. ALICE households are essential to the fabric of our economy. When these families struggle, businesses face workforce instability, neighborhoods weaken and our region's growth is constrained. But when ALICE families have access to housing, quality childcare, healthcare and career pathways, they succeed — and so does Miami.

So let this moment be more than a summit. Let it be a turning point.

As leaders from across the country gather here this week, I invite Miami's business, government and community leaders to lean in, study the data, support policies that strengthen working families and invest in solutions that move us from insight to action. United Way Miami stands ready to convene partners, advance policy and steward resources to ensure that those who power our economy can afford to live and prosper in the communities they serve.

Because when we unite with clarity, compassion and action, Miami can lead the nation in building a more sustainable future for every hardworking family.

Symeria Hudson is president and CEO of United Way Miami.