Institute for Family
LIGHT LAB

A NOTE TO READERS: THIS ANALYSIS WAS GENERATED WITH AI

This data update was produced using an AI assistant directed to compare the United For ALICE 2026 North Carolina Report (data year 2024) with the 2025 report (data year 2023) and identify figures in the *AI in Practice* series that required updating. The figures included in this update were verified against the published 2026 report and the United Way of North Carolina summary before publication.

The ALICE Numbers Have Changed

What the 2026 Report Means for the Data in This Series

A data correction and update to the AI in Practice series — incorporating the United For ALICE 2026 North Carolina Report, which uses 2024 American Community Survey data in place of the 2023 data cited in earlier articles

Every article in this series that references the ALICE Report has been citing the 2025 edition, which used 2023 American Community Survey data. In 2026, United For ALICE released a new North Carolina report using 2024 data. Several figures changed. This update identifies those revisions, explains their significance, and provides the figures practitioners should use going forward.

The core finding of the series is unchanged: **nearly half of North Carolina households cannot afford the basics on what they earn**. The structural argument every article makes — that wages fall short of survival costs, that financial fragility is structural rather than individual, that the gap between the federal poverty line and real survival costs is the central measurement problem — remains accurate. What changed are specific numbers, and in one case those numbers improved. That is worth naming directly.

WHAT CHANGED — THE KEY NUMBERS

The Headline Figure: 41 Percent, Down From 42-43 Percent

The most significant change is the headline percentage of NC households below the ALICE Threshold. Earlier articles in this series cited 42 percent (and in some versions 43 percent, which included a slightly different household count methodology from 2022 data). The 2026 report, using 2024 data, shows 41 percent of NC households below the ALICE Threshold — matching the national average exactly and placing NC 32nd among all states and the District of Columbia.

A two-point improvement is meaningful. It reflects real, if modest, economic progress for some NC households between 2023 and 2024. It does not change the structural picture: **41 percent is still nearly half the state**, still a figure that dwarfs the official poverty rate, and still the population that family-serving practitioners serve every day.

41%	42%	32nd
NC Households Below ALICE Threshold — 2024	**Prior Figure Used in This Series**	**NC Rank Among States — 2024**
Down from 42% in 2023 | 2026 ALICE Report	*2023 data | 2025 ALICE Report — now superseded*	*Same as national average | 2026 ALICE Report*

Source: United For ALICE / United Way of North Carolina, The State of ALICE in North Carolina 2026 (data year 2024)

THE SURVIVAL BUDGET FIGURES

The statewide average Household Survival Budget figures cited here are drawn from the county-level statewide averages reported in the 2026 ALICE report and may differ slightly from household-type examples presented elsewhere in the report. The ALICE Household Survival Budget — the minimum cost of housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, and technology for a given household type in a given county — is recalculated every year. Earlier articles cited $78,576 as the average annual survival budget for a family of four in North Carolina. This figure appeared in the 2025 report's county range data. The 2026 report shows the statewide average Household Survival Budget at approximately $80,232 for a family of four with two adults and two children in child care — higher than the previously cited figure, reflecting rising costs between 2023 and 2024.

For single adults, the statewide average Household Survival Budget is **$30,336 annually**, equivalent to approximately **$14.58 per hour** for a full-time worker. This figure provides an updated benchmark for ALICE-based wage comparisons and replaces the **$15.82/hour** living-wage estimate cited in Article 2, *The Helper's Dilemma*. At this updated level, the survival budget benchmark remains close to the wages earned by many North Carolina childcare and direct care workers discussed in that article, underscoring how little financial cushion these occupations often provide.

$80,232	$30,336	$31,200
Average Survival Budget — Family of Four, NC 2024	**Average Survival Budget — Single Adult, NC 2024**	**2024 Federal Poverty Line — Family of Four**
Up from ~$78,576 | Two adults, two children in care	*~$14.58/hr full-time | 2026 ALICE Report*	*Unchanged | The structural gap remains large*

Source: United For ALICE, The State of ALICE in North Carolina 2026; Federal Poverty Guidelines 2024 (HHS)

WHAT DID NOT CHANGE

FIGURES THAT REMAIN ACCURATE — NO UPDATE NEEDED

→ The federal poverty line comparison ($32,000 / $31,200 for a family of four) — set by HHS, independently sourced, unchanged in substance

→ The wage figures for childcare workers ($13.99/hr) and direct care workers ($13.62/hr) — sourced from BLS and Early Years NC, not from ALICE

→ The racial disparity framing — Black and Hispanic households remain disproportionately below the ALICE Threshold in 2024; the directional finding is consistent

→ The structural argument — wages fall short of survival costs, the poverty line understates real need, and the gap between the FPL and the ALICE Threshold is where the families practitioners serve are concentrated

→ The ALICE concept, definition, and methodology — unchanged across report years

WHAT THE ONE-POINT IMPROVEMENT MEANS

The drop from 42 percent to 41 percent in NC households below the ALICE Threshold between 2023 and 2024 is a real improvement and should be reported as such. It represents approximately 45,000 households that crossed above the survival threshold in that period — people whose wages, costs, or household composition shifted enough to move them out of financial fragility. That is not a rounding error. It is a meaningful data point.

It is also one point, in a state where 41 percent of households — more than 1.8 million — are still below the cost of survival. NC matching the national average means it is no longer worse than most of the country on this measure. It does not mean the structural conditions this series documents have been resolved. The ALICE Threshold itself rose — survival costs increased from 2023 to 2024, meaning households had to earn more just to stay above the line. The improvement reflects a combination of wage growth and possible household composition changes; it is not evidence that the underlying wage structure of NC's economy has fundamentally changed.

DATA SOURCES

1. United For ALICE / United Way of North Carolina, The State of ALICE in North Carolina 2026 (data year 2024). unitedforalice.org/county-reports/north-carolina

2. United Way of North Carolina, 'ALICE in North Carolina' summary page — 2024 key findings. unitedwaync.org/alice-north-carolina

3. United For ALICE, National Overview 2026 (data year 2024) — national household count and state rankings. unitedforalice.org/national-overview

4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024 Poverty Guidelines — federal poverty line figures. aspe.hhs.gov

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This data update applies to Articles that reference the ALICE Data in the AI in Practice series. Readers are encouraged to review these articles with the understanding that the data is current as of the dates referenced. Please refer to the original data sources to ensure accuracy.