ALICE IN PIERCE COUNTY
2016 Point-in-Time Data

Population: 861,312 • Number of Households: 317,671
Median Household Income: $64,434 (state average: $67,106)
Unemployment Rate: 6.2% (state average: 5.4%)
ALICE Households: 31% (state average: 28%) • Households in Poverty: 11% (state average: 11%)

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). Combined, the number of ALICE and poverty-level households equals the total population struggling to afford basic needs. The number of households below the ALICE Threshold changes over time; households move in and out of poverty and ALICE as their circumstances improve or worsen. The recovery, starting in 2010, has been uneven across the state. Conditions have improved for some families, but with rising costs, many still find themselves struggling.

What types of households are struggling?

The way Americans live is changing. There are more different family and living combinations than ever before, including more people living alone or with roommates and more adult children living with their parents. Families with children are changing: There are more blended families with remarried parents, more non-married cohabiting parents, and more same-sex parents. The number of senior households is also increasing. Yet all types of households continue to struggle: There are ALICE and poverty-level households across all of these living arrangements.
Why do so many households struggle?

The cost of living continues to increase...

The Household Survival Budget reflects the bare minimum that a household needs to live and work today. It does not include savings for emergencies or future goals like college. In 2016, costs were well above the Federal Poverty Level of $11,880 for a single adult and $24,300 for a family of four. Family costs increased by 28 percent statewide from 2010 to 2016, compared to 9 percent inflation nationally.

Employment and wages vary by location and firm size, but across the state more than half of newly-hired workers earn less than the cost of the family Household Survival Budget. Small firms (<50 employees) often drive economic growth but their wages tend to be lower, especially in rural areas where they are the largest employers. Large firms (500+ employees) offer higher wages but are concentrated in cities, where the cost of living is also higher. Medium-size firms (50-500 employees) pay more but employ the fewest workers.

Employment by Firm Size and Wage for New Hires, 2016