Struggling in NJ — 52 percent of all workers earn less than $20 an hour

By **Dino Flammia** January 16, 2017 1:28 AM

Meet ALICE.

Actually, her name is Charlene. But the North Jersey woman represents hundreds of thousands of Garden State residents considered "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed" in a just-released report from United Way.

The mother of two has begun putting several bills on credit cards. She's watched her car get towed away. And now she's at risk of losing her home. This is all while working a full-time job.

"You can't keep a family of three afloat on my salary alone," she said in a video provided by United Way of Northern New Jersey.

According to the report, New Jersey's ALICE population spiked 29 percent from 629,982 in 2007 to 823,829 in 2014. These residents live above the federal poverty line, but below the basic cost of living for necessities such as housing, food and child care.

The report suggests it costs a single adult $24,300 to survive annually in New Jersey, and $64,176 for a family of four with two young children.

"On the one hand, we have basic household goods increasing more than the rate of inflation, and wages are not even keeping pace with inflation, so ALICE is really getting squeezed between those two things," said Stephanie Hoopes, the report's lead author and researcher.

Jobs paying more than $30 an hour accounted for one-third of all jobs in the state, representing growth, the report said. But 52 percent of jobs still pay less than $20 an hour, or $40,000 annually full time.

And from 2007 to 2014, the minimum costs to get by in New Jersey rose by 23 percent, outpacing the rate of inflation of 14 percent.

At 24 percent, Hunterdon county has the lowest share of homes living under the ALICE threshold, the report said. Cumberland County has the most at 59 percent. Atlantic and Camden counties saw the biggest ALICE percentage spikes from 2007 to 2014.

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