



CITY OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Office of the Mayor
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**Mayor Walsh launches Office of Financial Empowerment to address
poverty and income inequality**

*United Way and LISC to fund new financial opportunity centers in Dudley Square
and Financial District*

BOSTON – Today Mayor Martin J. Walsh, Vice Chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Cities of Opportunity Task Force, launched a wide-ranging effort to address poverty and income inequality in Boston with the help of several partners. Joined by Michael K. Durkin, President and CEO of United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, and representatives from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Jewish Vocational Service, Mayor Walsh announced the formation of a new Office of Financial Empowerment. The collaborative effort, part of Mayor Walsh's pledge to tackle systemic inequality, will allow the City and its partners to better align their work on the issue, develop creative strategies, and deliver coordinated services to residents.

Two new financial opportunity centers, funded by the United Way and LISC, are among the initial components of a sweeping plan to promote economic resilience in Boston. The full-service centers will offer job search assistance, access to training for career development, and financial coaching to help people manage their resources and obtain available benefits. A web-based assessment tool will allow staff to determine the needs of new clients and help them establish and track their employment goals. Research shows that families are more likely to achieve financial success through an integrated approach such as this one.

“As vice-chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Cities of Opportunity Task Force, I have pledged to confront the inequality that is holding too many Americans and too many Bostonians back,” said Mayor Walsh. “That’s what the Office of Financial Empowerment is all about. With the help of our partners at the United Way, LISC, and Jewish Vocational Service, we will provide the kinds of opportunities that individuals and families in Boston need in order to find good jobs and join the middle class.”

The new Roxbury Center for Financial Empowerment, based in Dudley Square, will be operated by the City, while a second financial opportunity center in the Financial District will be operated by Jewish Vocational Service. A third center is planned for South Boston next year.

“Partnerships are integral to this work,” said Mike Durkin of United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. “None of us can make progress on entrenched, complex issues such as poverty and income inequality alone. Our approach is to have multiple services and partners available in one location to work with individuals, coach them toward financial stability, and ensure that their children and families are also connected to other services they may need to thrive.”

United Way runs two similar centers in Chelsea and Lawrence. Last year, 77 percent of clients at those centers who completed pre- and post-assessments reported increases in one or more of the following measures: net income, net worth, or credit score.

New data released as part of today’s announcement underscores the urgent need for a concerted effort against rising inequality. According to [Family Assets Count](#), a project of the [Corporation for Enterprise Development](#) in collaboration with [Citi Community Development](#), 46 percent of Boston households do not have sufficient savings to live for three months if they suffer a disruption to income, such as losing a job or facing a medical crisis. For African American and Latino households in the city, that figure rises to 69 percent and 75 percent, respectively. Over the next two years, Family Assets Count will work in ten cities, starting in Boston, Chicago, Houston, Miami, and Sacramento, to inform programs and policies that move families towards economic resilience.

The Office of Jobs and Community Services (JCS), an affiliate of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, will oversee the new Office of Financial Empowerment. JCS funds job training programs, adult basic education, and English proficiency classes for adults, as well as summer jobs and after-school career exploration programs for youth. The annual Earned Income Tax Credit campaign, one of JCS’s signature programs, allows over 11,000 households in Boston to receive free tax preparation, which puts about \$22 million back into the pockets of local families each year. The Office of Financial Empowerment will expand on JCS’s work by leveraging partnerships to create a comprehensive strategy that will reach all residents in need.

“At LISC, we know from our work across the country that it is not enough just to help people find jobs,” said Bob Van Meter, Executive Director for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation in Boston. “They need the support and training to keep those jobs and become financially stable. We are excited to work with the city, United Way and the Jewish Vocational Service to bring this proven approach to Boston.”

Today’s announcement in Roxbury is part of a national push to address income inequality.

“Cities and Mayors nationwide are grappling with income inequality, said Sacramento Mayor and U.S. Conference of Mayors President Kevin Johnson. “Our cities will be better and our nation stronger as we close these gaps. Mayor Walsh’s actions today in launching two financial

empowerment centers, with the help of key partners, is a powerful example of Mayors getting things done that move our cities forward.”

“Whenever one city steps forward to confront the inequality crisis we face, it emboldens all of us and pushes this movement forward,” said New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio, Chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors’ Cities of Opportunity Task Force. “I am proud to work with Mayor Walsh on the Cities of Opportunity Task Force as we develop local solutions to overcome inequality and lift up struggling families. Boston’s effort to mobilize private partners to reach more people in need is a great example of the kind of change we need across this country.”

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