

## Belmont Human Rights Commission Statement on Poverty Awareness Month

January is poverty awareness month, an annual initiative to raise awareness to the crisis of poverty nation-wide. A great part of bringing awareness regarding the issue of poverty is to debunk myths about who is affected and provide education regarding factors that stress vulnerable families and individuals.

According to the [2020 US Census](#), the official poverty rate nationwide was 11.4%, presenting a 1% increase from 2019 and the first increase in poverty after five consecutive annual declines. In 2020, there were 37.2 million people living in poverty, approximately 3.3 million more than in 2019. Black Americans had the highest poverty rate (19.5%) which remained steady from 2019. However, the poverty rates for non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics also increased. The rates also increased for children and families, particularly for families with a female householder (from 22.2% to 23.4%). The poverty rate in Belmont is close to 6%.

According to [Feeding America](#), making ends meet with a lower income is more difficult if you are unemployed or employed in low-wage work, experience a crisis that impacts finances, have limited savings, and rent a home. People living with a disability and with medical conditions are more likely to experience hunger and lower incomes.

An analysis by researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), which was published in a letter to the [Journal of General Internal Medicine](#), emphasizes that pre-existing social inequities exacerbated the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on structurally disadvantaged groups such as people of color and low income populations.

On poverty awareness month, the Belmont Human Rights Commission wants to bring awareness that many of our friends, neighbors, and folks who visit and work in our town may be struggling. We must work together by supporting initiatives that will support individuals and families in their path out of poverty. Initiatives such as affordable housing, healthcare, and childcare, as well as access to food banks and addressing discrimination could make a significant difference.

The following resources may be useful: [The Belmont Food Pantry](#), [The Covid-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Information](#), [Early Education and Care Financial Assistance for Families](#), and the [Jewish Family & Children's Service](#).

The Belmont Human Rights Commission is dedicated to fighting discrimination in all forms and increasing visibility and awareness of issues regarding diversity and discrimination in our community. If you have experienced discrimination in Belmont, please contact us at [belmont.hrc@gmail.com](mailto:belmont.hrc@gmail.com) or call 617-993-2795.