

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund Launched for Monroe, Owen, Greene Counties

Fund will support critical human service needs during economic distress associated with the virus

Bloomington, IN – United Way of Monroe County and nearly 30 local organizations are partnering to launch the COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund to support immediate economic stability and basic needs in Monroe, Owen, and Greene counties in light of the pandemic.

The Fund will launch with over \$250,000 committed by individual donors and key partners including Bloomington Health Foundation, Community Foundation of Bloomington Monroe County, Monroe County Government, City of Bloomington, Monroe County Community Schools Foundation, Bloomington Township, Perry Township, Van Buren Township, Duke Energy, Cook Group, Old National Bank, and Owen County State Bank. United Way will seek donations from other organizations and individuals in the weeks ahead. Bloomington Health Foundation is offering to double the impact of individual donations with a matching grant up to \$25,000.

“Bloomington Health Foundation stands beside our local health and social service partners in these uncertain times. This initial investment will help our partners address urgent needs. Moving forward, we are committed to listening to our partners as we seek to understand our community’s developing needs and where help is needed in the days and weeks ahead,” said President & CEO of Bloomington Health Foundation Jonathan Barada.

Grants will be distributed to human service organizations in Monroe, Owen, and Greene counties best positioned to meet the emerging needs resulting from this crisis. Priority needs for the fund will focus on:

- 1) sustaining operations and levels of service of area nonprofits meeting community members’ basic needs;
- 2) developing safe, temporary residential programs for at-risk individuals currently unsheltered, or in mass shelters or group homes;
- 3) funding temporary staffing or volunteer mobilization efforts in response to loss of volunteer base critical to daily operations; and

4) increasing capacity of local food security systems and financial assistance programs at area townships and nonprofits

The launch of this fund builds on the experience of the Tornado Relief Fund of 2019, as well as United Way's Flood Relief Fund of 2008. Following the flood recovery, the structure for the Monroe County Community Organizations Active in Disaster response (MOCOAD) group, which convenes regularly in order to coordinate community-based responses to disasters, was set in place. Those funds also provided similar support for organizations and individuals during recovery from major natural disasters.

"In our community, 1 in 3 households teeter above the edge of poverty, financially stretched by ever-rising costs of housing, childcare, transportation and more. Additionally, 1 in 5 live in full-blown poverty with more significant challenges," said United Way of Monroe County executive Director Efrat Feferman. "This means that nearly half of our population cannot easily weather prolonged economic turmoil. Many already turn to our social services and nonprofits for supports which allow them to remain economically stable. It is imperative that programs including affordable childcare and after-school care, food and nutrition, transportation, physical and mental healthcare, shelter and housing, and temporary financial assistance for mortgage, rent, and utilities are sustained and even increased at this time."

In addition to sustaining the capacity of area nonprofits to serve human needs, United Way and its identified the pressing need for temporary housing options for at-risk individuals showing symptoms of illness and residing currently in shelters such as Shalom Community Center's Friend's Place, New Hope for Families, Wheeler Mission, and Middle Way House, as well as those residing in group home settings such as through LifeDesigns and Stone Belt. Executive Director of New Hope for Families Emily Pike, whose agency serves families impacted by homelessness, stressed the significance of this particular need, noting that, "as inconvenient as it may be to isolate ourselves in our homes, not everyone in our community has a home to go to. We've got to prioritize finding places for those experiencing homelessness to isolate, convalesce, and recover from this illness and others which may come. It's important for our community's health and for our community's character. This is the time to show up for people in need."

Community leaders recognize the potential for economic distress, particularly for workers in jobs in the service and hospitality industries, is high. Organizations that serve populations in need every day will find themselves under-resourced to serve a growing demand for those services. Additionally, the network is actively working together to find new and innovative ways to provide services that incorporate concepts of social distancing into service practices.

"We can think of no greater priority today than for us, as a community, to ensure that the basic needs of all our friends and neighbors are being met," shared Tina Peterson, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of

Bloomington Monroe County added, “the Community Foundation is grateful for the opportunity to join organizations and individuals from across the community in supporting the United Way’s Emergency Relief Fund. In the coming days, we will be exploring other emerging needs that are becoming apparent and will determine what else we should be doing during this critical time for our community.”

A coalition of cross-sector community partners is working to identify critical needs and resource gaps, while determining the best approach to disseminating emergency funds with the appropriate sense of urgency. Given the evolving nature of this situation, the fund is designed to be flexible and get funds to organizations serving those in need in the weeks ahead.

In authorizing monies to the Relief Fund, a joint statement by Julie Thomas, President of the Monroe County Board of Commissioners, and Eric Spoonmore, President of the Monroe County Council, noted, “Monroe County Government is unified in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our community. The safety, health, and well-being of Monroe County residents is always the highest priority for the Board of Commissioners and the County Council. This swift action we are taking today will immediately provide urgent resources to affected residents and will further assist our local social service agencies working at ground zero of the corona virus public health emergency. We thank United Way of Monroe County for stepping up, as always, in this critical time of need.”

“While United Way serves as the trusted vehicle for relief funding at this time of need, it is indeed the entire community powering this effort,” added Feferman. “Together we are assuring that our safety net is strengthened to better meet the challenges underway.”

Community members needing assistance should search [HelpingBloomingtonMonroe.org](https://www.HelpingBloomingtonMonroe.org) or call 2-1-1 to connect with needed resources.

United Way has established an opportunity for individuals to donate via text or online. Text COVIDRELIEF2020 to 44-321 or visit www.monroeunitedway.org/COVIDRelief to make a contribution.

FUND LAUNCH SUPPORTERS:

Bloomington Health Foundation
Bloomington Township
City of Bloomington
Community Foundation of Bloomington Monroe County
Cook Group
Duke Energy
MCCSC Foundation

Monroe County Government
Old National Bank
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About United Way of Monroe County: United Way of Monroe County is a nonprofit organization that improves people's lives by addressing critical needs today and working to reduce those needs tomorrow. Through its Community Action Fund and grant initiatives, United Way works with 24 member agencies and community partners to ensure families have opportunities and everyone can meet basic living needs.