

ABOUT LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

Located twenty-five miles north of Boston, Lawrence, Massachusetts is truly a city of immigrants and industry. Known as the "Immigrant City", Lawrence has always been a multi-ethnic and multicultural gateway city with a high proportion of foreign-born residents.

The successive waves of immigrants coming to Lawrence to work in the mills began with the Irish, followed by French Canadians, British, and Germans in the late 1800s. Around the turn of the century and early 1900s, Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Syrians began arriving. A wave of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans started in the mid-late 1900s, and the newest arrivals originate from Vietnam and Cambodia. The current population of roughly 70,000 is largely Hispanic and has given a Latino slant to the local economy and culture.

The massive mill buildings lining the Merrimack River, the striking clock and bell towers, and the breath-taking Great Stone Dam are all a tribute to Lawrence's rich industrial heritage. Once a thriving industrial center, Lawrence now faces significant economic challenges that have an enormous impact on people's ability to sufficiently feed themselves.

According to the United States Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey report (released in August 2006):

- Lawrence has a per capita income of \$14,753 - only 48 percent of the statewide average per capita income of \$30,686.
- The median household income in Lawrence is \$26,780 - 45 percent of the average statewide median household income of \$59,963.
- Of Lawrence's people, 28 percent live below the poverty line, compared with 10 percent of the statewide population.
- An overwhelming 38 percent of children under age 18 in Lawrence live in households below the poverty line, as compared to 12 percent of children under age 18 statewide.
- A sobering 22 percent of people age 65 and over in Lawrence live below the poverty line, as compared to nine percent of people age 65 and over statewide.

Eastern Massachusetts is one of the most expensive housing markets in the country. Lawrence has a significant housing shortage, leading to disproportionately expensive housing costs. Many of the residents of Lawrence are forced to choose to pay for housing rather than for food.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's "Massachusetts Births 2005" report (released in February 2007) reveals the startling social and health care conditions in which the majority of children in Lawrence are born:

- In 2005, 64.5 percent of the babies born in Lawrence were born to unmarried mothers, as compared to 30.2 percent of babies statewide.
- Lawrence's teen birth rate is the third highest in Massachusetts - in 2005, 71.7 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19, which is more than three times the statewide average of 21.7 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19.
- 70.5 percent of Lawrence's women who gave birth in 2004 relied on public funding for prenatal care, as compared to 32.6 percent of women statewide.

On the educational front, Lawrence faces daunting challenges:

- At the beginning of 2007, the Massachusetts Department of Education reported that Lawrence has the worst graduation rate of any municipal public school system in Massachusetts, graduating only 41 percent of the Class of 2006. This placed Lawrence 276th of 279 schools studied, with only three charter schools performing worse.
- In the 2007 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, 31 percent of high school students failed English (compared to six percent of students statewide) and 47 percent failed mathematics (compared to nine percent of students statewide).
- Lawrence, MA is a wonderful city with a rich history, a vibrant population, dedicated leaders, and development projects that offer hope for the future. It is also a city with dramatic socioeconomic problems that must be addressed not just in the future, but today.

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