

# STATE OF THE COUNTY UPDATE

## 2025

This 2025 update builds on the Berkshire Benchmarks State of the County Report published in May 2022 and subsequent updates in 2023 and 2024. This overview highlights notable changes in regional indicators. Note that these are not all of the indicators; a full list can be found online at [BerkshireBenchmarks.org](http://BerkshireBenchmarks.org). This report focuses only on indicators that show recent changes. All indicators are updated with the latest data as of April 2025. Readers are encouraged to visit the site at [www.berkshirebenchmarks.org](http://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org).

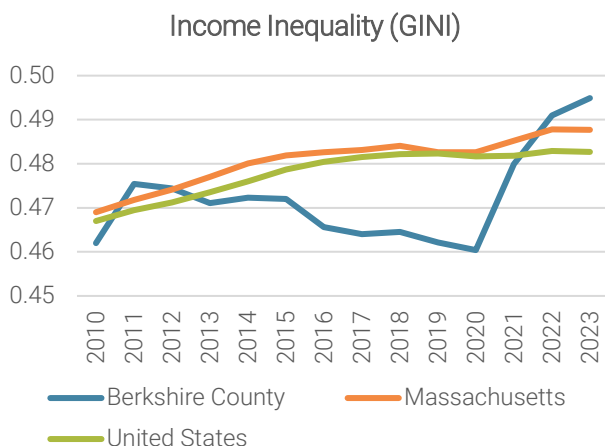
### INDICATORS

Since the 2024 State of the County Update, most indicators have shown little change. However, the indicators that show noteworthy changes are:

### ECONOMY

#### *Income Inequality (2023)*

Income inequality uses the GINI Coefficient, which is the idea of perfectly equal income distribution, where a 0 indicates equality and a 1 indicates perfect inequality. Income Inequality has continued to increase dramatically in Berkshire County and is higher than the state, nation, or any of our comparable counties. A high coefficient indicates reduced social and economic mobility and increased health and education disparities.

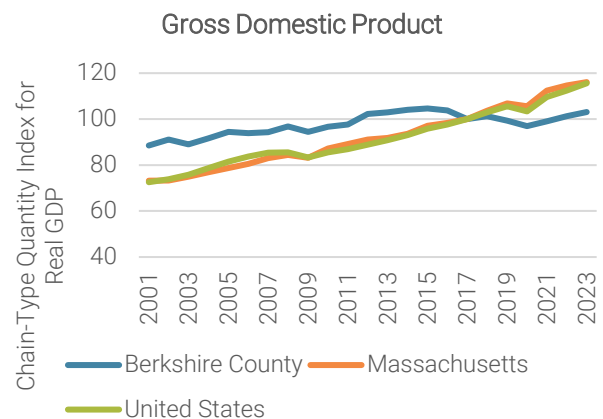


The Berkshire communities with the highest coefficient,

and thus the most economic inequality, tend to be in the communities with higher tourism and density of second homes.

#### *Gross Domestic Product (2023)*

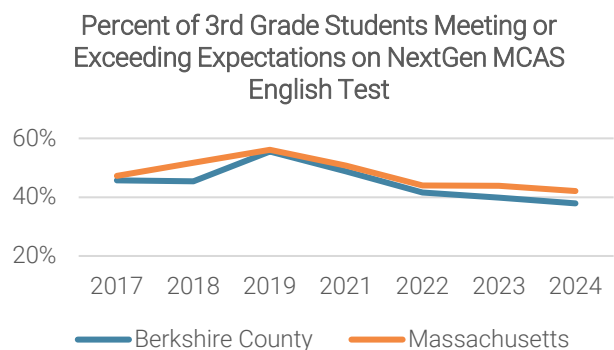
Berkshire County's gross domestic product has started to increase slowly over the last few years. However, it is still growing more slowly than the state, nation, and most comparable communities.



### EDUCATION

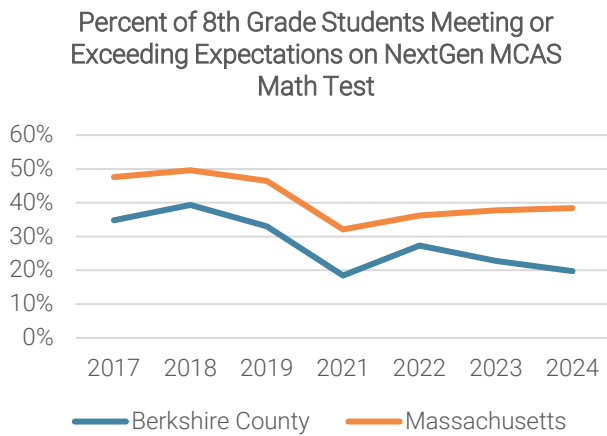
#### *3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency (2024)*

The county has continued to see a decline in reading proficiency since the peak in 2019. The county is following state trends, but it is slightly lower than the state.



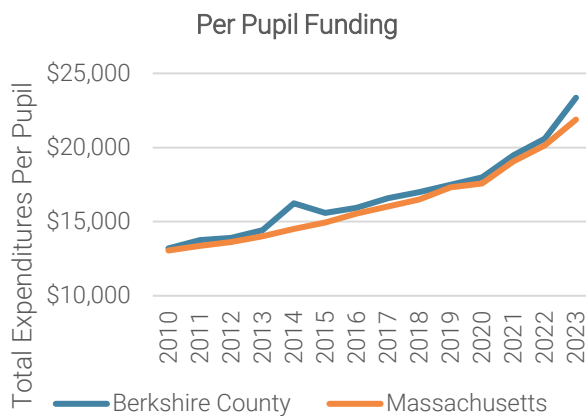
### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math Proficiency (2024)

Eighth-grade math proficiency continues to decline and is significantly lower than the state average by almost 20%. The district results vary widely across the county, with the wealthier districts performing at or above the state average.



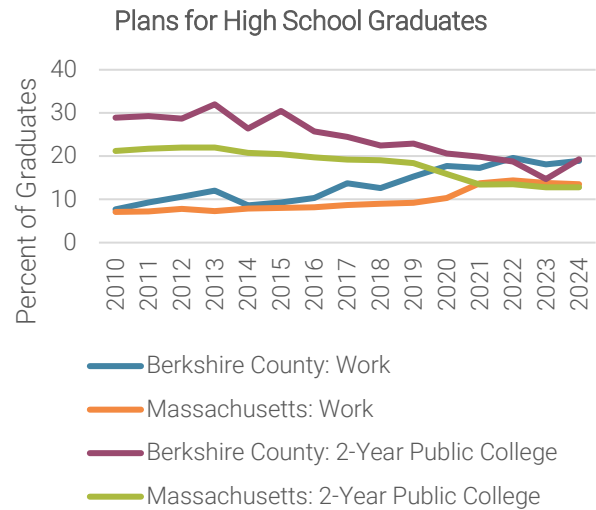
### Per-Pupil Funding (2023)

Berkshire County's per-pupil spending has risen sharply over the last year, increasing almost \$3,000/student. In addition, the county is now almost \$2,000 above the state average, previously within a few hundred dollars.



### Plans for High School Graduates (2024)

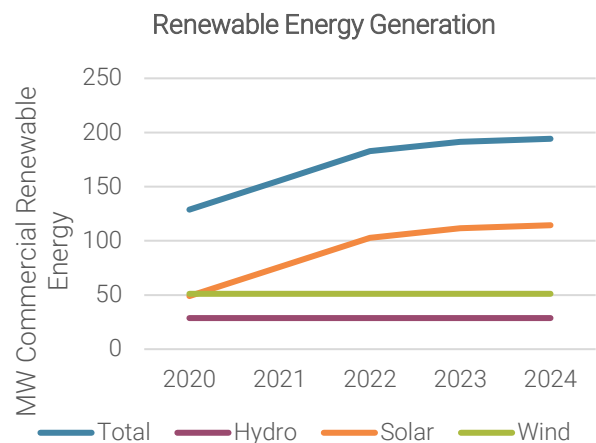
High school graduates continue to show an increase in their plans to work after high school. This increase has impacted the plans to attend two-year public colleges, which have shown a corresponding decrease.



## ENVIRONMENT

### Renewable Energy Generation (2024)

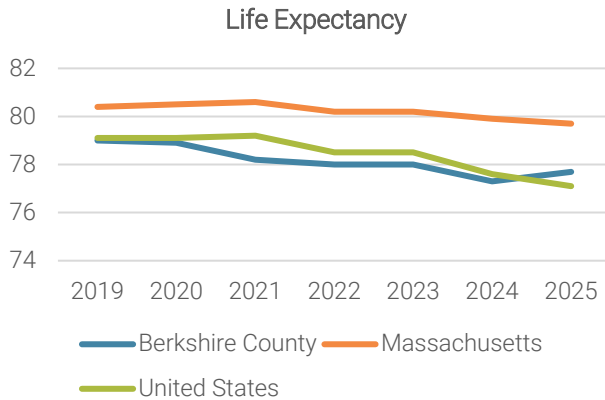
Renewable energy generated in Berkshire County continues to increase. Most of this increase is due to solar generation, as hydro and wind have remained stable for the last few years. The increase has slowed over the last year, likely due to less land being easily developed for solar.



## HEALTH

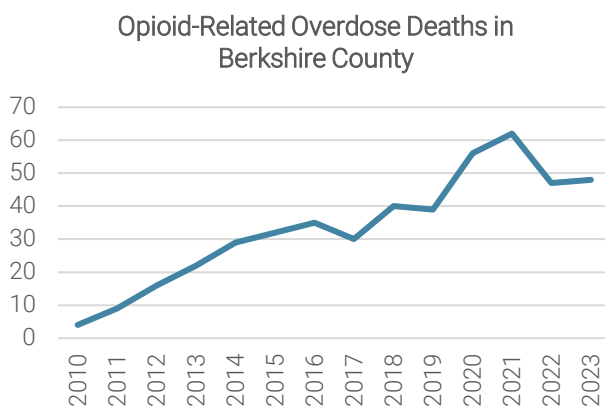
### *Life Expectancy (2025)*

Berkshire County's life expectancy increased for the first time in many years. This is the opposite of the state and nation, which continued to decline slightly. The county's life expectancy surpassed the nation for the first time; however, it continues to be lower than all of our comparable counties.



### *Substance Misuse (2023)*

The number of opioid-related overdose deaths in Berkshire County has remained stable for the last two years. This is lower than it was during the pandemic, but still higher than it has historically been.



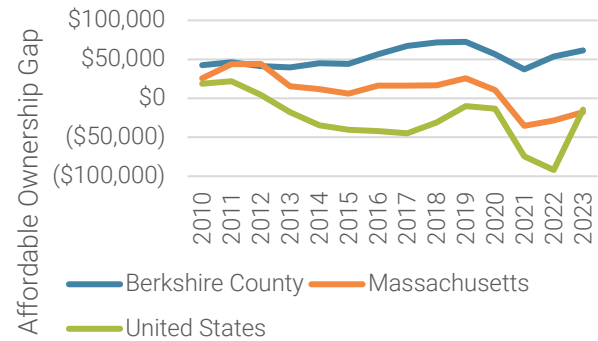
## HOUSING

### *Housing Affordability Gap (2023)*

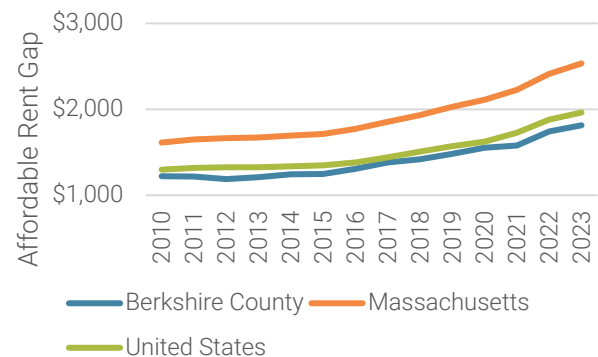
The difference between what a household can afford (30% of income) and the current average housing costs is called the affordability gap. The rental gap in Berkshire County continues to increase in a good direction; however, this is calculated based on the median household income, not just the renter's income.

In addition, the gap for owners is growing in a good direction. It is well documented that lower and middle-income households have trouble finding affordable housing in the county. In many southern Berkshire communities, the homeownership gap is negative, meaning purchasing a home is impossible for the average household.

### **Affordable Ownership Gap**



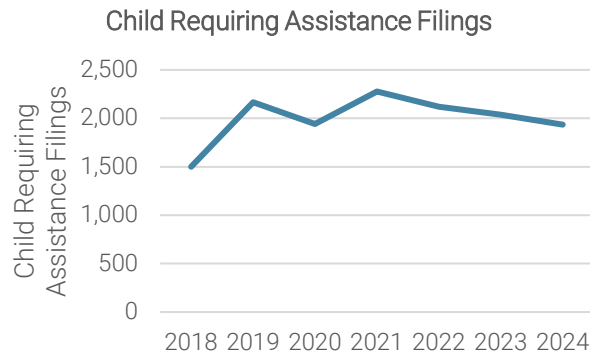
### **Affordable Rent Gap**



## SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

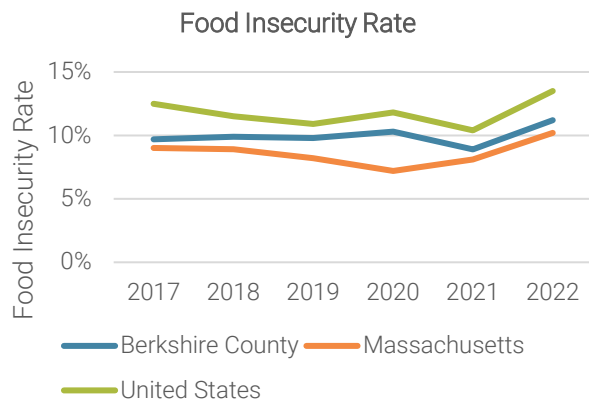
### *Child Requiring Assistance Filings(2024)*

The number of filings for children requiring assistance remains high, but has declined since the high in 2021.



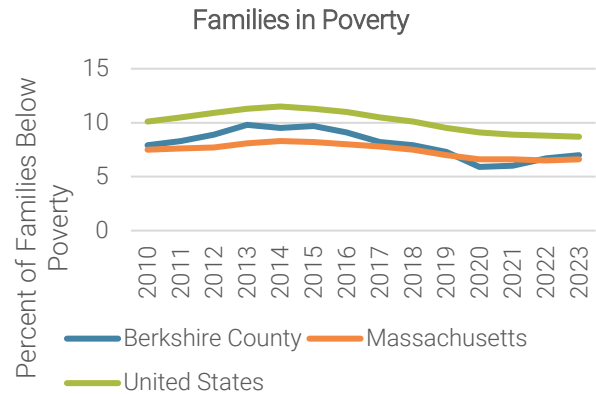
### *Food Insecurity (2022)*

The food insecurity rate for Berkshire County continues to increase, indicating that households are having a more difficult time accessing enough food. The rate is lower than the nation's but higher than the state and many comparable counties.



### *Families in Poverty (2023)*

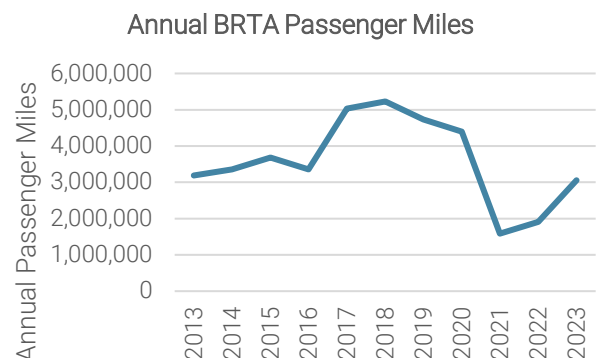
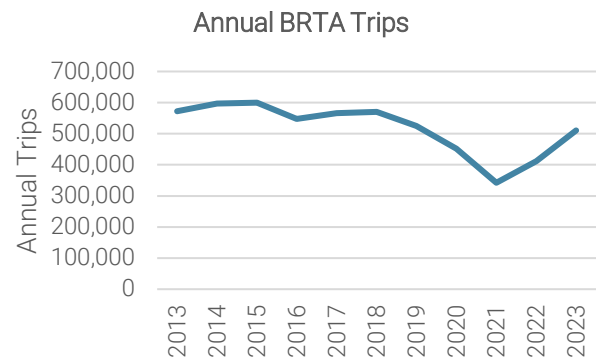
The percentage of families in poverty has been increasing over the last three years, contrary to the state and nation, which have shown continued declines. This is likely tied to the county's income inequality. The county is below the national rate, but higher than the state and all of the comparable counties. Communities in the northern part of our county tend to have a higher rate of families in poverty.



## TRANSPORTATION

### *BRTA Ridership (2023)*

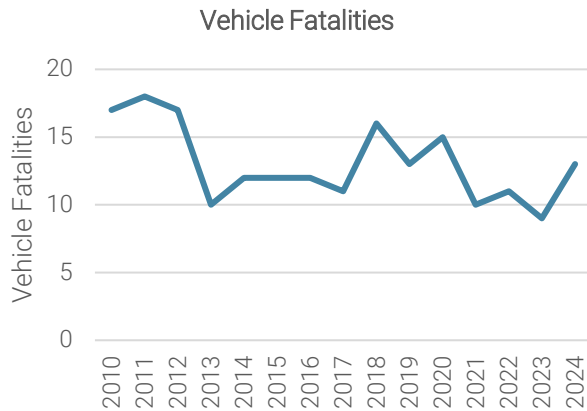
The number of annual trips on the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority's buses has increased over the last few years and is almost back at pre-pandemic levels. The number of annual passenger miles continues to lag pre-pandemic levels. This indicates that the trips are shorter while the ridership has resumed.



### ***Vehicle Fatalities (2024)***

After several years of decline, the number of vehicle fatalities in Berkshire County increased by 44%. The absolute number is still low at 13 and is below several historic years, but the trend's rise is concerning.

something Berkshire Benchmarks will monitor. In addition, many data sources are from federal agencies, so there is uncertainty about the future availability of the data.



### **THINGS TO WATCH**

There are several more significant topics that the region and Berkshire Benchmarks will continue to monitor to see how they impact the region and its data. These items can have significant cross-cutting impacts on the region.

- *Housing:* The pandemic caused a significant increase in housing prices. These prices seem to have stabilized; however, they continue to be higher than most working families can afford. With the high interest rates, these high prices have made the challenge for local households to buy a house even harder.
- *Education:* In 2024, voters in Massachusetts removed passing the MCAS as a graduation requirement. The districts will still administer the tests for data collection, but it is not known how this change in requirements will affect the scores or graduation rates in the county.
- *Politics:* With the current federal administration implementing changes throughout the government, there is concern about the local impact it will cause. It will take a few years to see changes in the data, but it will be

