FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Thursday, September 2, 2021

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Nate Dougherty, Communication coordinator
Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
(585) 749-2650
nathan.dougherty@rmapiny.org

Level Up Champions move thousands of Rochester residents to $15/hour in 2021

Rochester, NY—Thanks to the commitment of our community’s Level Up Champions, thousands of employees across the Greater Rochester region have moved to $15 per hour or more this year.

In February, the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative’s Steering Committee established a goal to lead a new effort that will increase wages to at least $15 per hour for 10,000 Rochester residents in 2021. In the past months, a number of organizations have taken this critical step toward wage equality, including many of our region’s largest employers.

Together, these organizations have given our community a significant raise. A total of 6,548 Rochester residents have already moved to at least $15 per hour this year, with more local partners making commitments in the coming weeks.

“We applaud the organizations that have chosen to stand with RMAPI and make this commitment to our community,” said Aqua Y. Porter, RMAPI Executive Director. “Even as they face financial pressures and the uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought in the last year, these Level Up Champions have recognized the value that their employees bring and the dignity inherent in all work. Their commitment is a shining example to all employers in our community that everyone can be part of the solution to poverty, and that taking the first step toward wage equity is within their grasp.”

A total of 40 organizations have expressed their commitment to a $15/hour minimum wage, including the region’s two largest employers, the University of Rochester and Rochester Regional Health.

“This represents one of the most significant steps our community has ever taken to address poverty,” said Daan Braveman, RMAPI co-chair. “Since leaders of our community first came together in 2015 to develop a comprehensive strategy to fight poverty, it has been clear that this effort would require the dedicated efforts of a vast coalition of partners all working together toward the same goal. The progress our community has made in the matter of just a few months shows that every organization—from our region’s largest employer to organizations that employ just a few people—can be part of the solution to poverty, and it starts with a commitment to a $15 per hour wage.”

Wage increases from Rochester’s Level Up Champions will have wide-ranging effects across our community, lifting up many of the groups most affected by poverty. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found that the typical employee earning less than $15 per hour is a woman over the age of 25 who works full-time, and roughly half are persons of color. If all employers in New York state committed to a $15 per hour starting
wage, more than half of all Latino workers and 40% percent of African-American workers would receive a raise, EPI found.

These wage increases can be significant for workers and their families. EPI found that the typical worker whose wages are raised to $15 per hour will receive a roughly $4,800 per year raise.

“We thank these organizations not only for helping to move people out of poverty and toward self-sufficiency, but also for taking a major step to eradicate structural racism,” said Jerome Underwood, RMAPI Steering Committee co-chair. “The 2017 Wage Disparities report from the City of Rochester and RMAPI demonstrated what we know to be a sad and unacceptable reality—that our Black and Brown neighbors earn less than their white counterparts in nearly every industry sector, and regardless of educational attainment. The commitment from Rochester’s Level Up Champions proves that we have the power to start addressing these inequities by raising wages.”

More information about Rochester’s Level Up Champions, including a full list of those that have made the commitment, can be found at www.LevelUpChampion.org.

About RMAPI

The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) is a multi-sector community collaborative whose aim is to **improve quality of life by reducing poverty and increasing self-sufficiency.**

RMAPI has developed three guiding principles to inform its work and serve as a guide for community decision-making: **address structural racism, address trauma and build community.**

For more details on the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, visit www.endingpovertynow.org.
What is a Level Up Champion?

A Level Up Champion is an employer that has taken the first step toward wage equity by instituting a $15/hour or higher starting wage within their organization. This commitment demonstrates their investment in their employees and is one way they are doing their part to address poverty in the Greater Rochester Area.

Founded by the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI), the Level Up Champion recognition program is both a celebration of progress and an urgent call to action. Our recognition badge celebrates organizations who have made the decision to increase their starting wage, showing that doing the right thing is part of their company’s DNA.

When a company displays the Level Up Champion insignia within the workplace or online, it signifies to current employees, potential employees and the general public that they believe that increasing wages are essential to fighting poverty and their organization is committed to being a part of the wider movement to lift our entire community.

The Level Up Champions badge also gives consumers a quick and easy way to identify businesses that align with their values.

By very publicly recognizing which organizations have taken this step, we’re also hoping to inspire other employers to commit to a $15/hour starting wage, knowing their efforts will be recognized and they will have the full support of the RMAPI collective.

Progress through Process

Poverty is the greatest crisis that Rochester has ever faced.

The majority of adults in the labor force are employed and yet more than two-thirds who have jobs are still living in poverty. Additionally, single-income households – the vast majority headed by single women – make up 2/3 of poor households, and are where we find 80% of children living in poverty.

Wage enhancements need to be part of the solution.
Our mission is to create widespread, culture-shifting improvements that reduce poverty in Rochester long-term. Encouraging area employers to move to $15/hour is only one step, in a big, collective effort to achieve three high-level outcomes:

1. Increased income, through better jobs and access to critical supports
2. Increased accessibility and affordability of basic needs, through more affordable housing, better coordination of services and more effective utilization of benefits
3. Decreased concentration of poverty, through strengthened communities, home to self-sufficient families

These outcomes are being pursued aggressively, and simultaneously, in dozens of ways, by RMAPI and our partners. Through the nationally respected collective impact framework, we are collaborating in ways never experienced here before, to connect programs and services with the people who need them, and creating an integrated system that achieves meaningful progress at the individual, family, and community levels.

Level Up Champions are making significant contributions and their ongoing partnership is essential to sustained positive change.
Rochester's Level Up Champions
Wage Enhancement Facts

- Low wages are recognized as one of the leading causes of poverty. Peter Edelman, a national expert in social welfare policy and the director of Georgetown University’s Center on Poverty, Inequality & Public Policy, was invited to speak in Rochester to help the community formulate a response to this crisis. The solution, he concluded, was to increase income for the lowest-wage workers.

“Low wages are by far the single leading cause of poverty in America,” Edelman told a group of more than 500 civic leaders in Rochester.

- A 2017 report from the City of Rochester entitled “Poverty and the Concentration of Poverty in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area” exposed income disparities within our community and the significant impact on our Black and brown neighbors. The findings showed that:
  - Many part-time and seasonal workers live in poverty or are not self-sufficient.
  - Minorities are over-represented in several key service industries.
  - The industries with over-representation of minorities also tend to be the county’s lowest paying and largest sectors.
  - Minorities earn less than their white counterparts in nearly every industry sector.
  - Regardless of educational attainment, the wage gap between whites and minorities persists.

- Today, in all areas across the United States, a single adult without children needs at least $31,200 to achieve a modest but adequate standard of living, according to projections from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI). This is what a full-time worker making $15 an hour earns annually.

- The typical worker earning less than $15 per hour in New York state is a woman over 25 who works full-time and provides on average half of her household’s income, according to analysis by the EPI.

- Statewide, roughly half of those below $15 per hour are persons of color. If all employers in New York committed to a $15 per hour wage, more than half of all Latino
workers and 40% of African-American workers would receive a raise. (EPI)

- The workers who would benefit from a move to $15 per hour are typically responsible for earning half of their family’s total income. More than a quarter (27 percent) of affected workers are the sole providers of their family’s income. (EPI)

- Since the Fight for $15 campaign first launched in 2012, nine states representing approximately 40% of the U.S. workforce—California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and the District of Columbia—have approved raising their minimum wages to $15 per hour.

**Level Up Champion Facts**

- A total of 40 organizations have expressed their commitment to a $15 per hour minimum wage.

- The organizations that have expressed a commitment to $15 per hour wages collectively employ more than 60,000 people. This includes our region’s two largest employers, the University of Rochester and Rochester Regional Health.

- Because the footprint for many of these organizations stretches beyond the Greater Rochester region, thousands of more employees across Western New York have seen wage increases in 2021.

- 14 of the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative’s Steering Committee member organizations have committed to a $15 per hour minimum wage.