FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:                                                                                   Contact: Joanne Troutman

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Sunbury, PA – The Basic Needs Task Force and Disaster Preparedness Subcommittee at The Greater Susquehanna Valley United Way are proactively creating a plan to mitigate the potential effects that COVID-19 restrictions and illness could have on our community.

Members of the Task Force, which include leaders from non-profits, faith-based organizations and government organizations, are in the process of identifying various potential resources that would be available to individuals and families in our community, should schools and businesses close for an extended period of time.

“The health and safety of our community is and should be our greatest priority. The precautions we are putting into place, however, will interrupt the normal flow of business for human service agencies at a time where the need for their services will only increase,” said Joanne Troutman, President & CEO of Greater Susquehanna Valley United Way.

“Food access is top of mind for us, as I know it is for school leaders across the community. We need to be sure that individuals and families who have food-related needs have access in the event that they are isolated for an extended period of time. Concurrently, we need to put safeguards in place to protect staff, volunteers and clients.”

Task Force members are reaching out to government officials to determine the best process for ensuring services continue and that agencies have the resources to expand programs as needed.

Many volunteers at food pantries are retired and among those at greatest risk for complications from this disease. Task Force members are monitoring this and discussing potential reorganizing staff to allow those volunteers to limit contact with the public. This may also require our agencies to recruit young and healthy individuals to fill in temporarily. The group is also evaluating other potential impacts.

“Should COVID-19 affect our region in the same way it has in hot spots around the world, we are anticipating the hospitals to staff up,” Troutman said. “This would make it likely that there would be a need for expanded childcare services for healthcare workers to accommodate extended working hours. We are actively monitoring this issue.”

Additionally, with closures and a marked slowdown in the economy, the Task Force is preparing for people to lose work hours, if only temporary, which means demands for assistance with housing-related needs will increase.
“We are reaching out to local banks and utility companies to determine what support and flexibility they may be able to provide clients, should this become an issue that affects people very broadly,” said Lois Passi, Local Vision and Basic Needs Task Force chair. “Through our ALICE research project, we know that in some areas, nearly half of our residents are already struggling to make ends meet. This will only amplify that.”

United Way is strongly encouraging non-profits and community agencies to follow CDC guidelines and limit travel and face-to-face contact, as well to cancel any large events planned in the next few weeks. The United Way is offering to pay for access to Zoom technologies for non-profits and other agencies that need the resources to do virtual meetings. The United Way’s Annual Meeting, scheduled to be held March 25, has been canceled.

If you are not in the demographic group at risk for complications from COVID-19 and are interested in being placed on list as a potential volunteer for future needs, please email admin@gsuw.org or call (570)988-0993 ext. 1 to leave your name, email address and mobile number.

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