



PRESS RELEASE
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**More than 30,000 Merrimack Valley Students Lack Back-To-School Basics,
Catie's Closet Seeks Support to Fill the Need**

The organization kicked off its ninth annual Fill the Bus community initiative to collect product and monetary donations to benefit 30,000 Merrimack Valley children in need.

Community and company participation opportunities include hosting clothing drives, donating new and gently used items, shopping from online wish lists, running online fundraisers, and participating in a virtual 5K.

DRACUT, MA – Catie's Closet, a nonprofit organization that provides children in need with free clothing and other necessities, seeks donations to support its ninth annual Fill the Bus initiative, the organization's community-wide back-to-school drive. More than 30,000 children live in poverty in the Merrimack Valley area and do not have access to basic necessities required for the beginning of the school year.

"The surest path out of poverty is education," says Mickey Cockrell, CEO & Co-Founder of Catie's Closet. "Our mission is to ensure that every child has access to the essentials that empower their success in school. This includes clothing, school supplies, hygiene products, shoes, socks, outerwear, and more. Fill the Bus is critical to stocking our closets and ensuring we can meet the needs of all students as they start the school year. We encourage individuals, families, companies, and entire communities to participate and make a difference for kids in need however they can."

Catie's Closet is running its Fill the Bus initiative now through September 30, 2024, with several ways for the entire community to get involved, including special engagement opportunities for local businesses and corporations.

Individuals and families interested in helping local students in grades preK-12 can do any of the following:

- [Purchase and donate](#) new clothes and/or full-sized toiletries from the Wish List.
- [Make a financial donation](#) to help Catie's Closet purchase urgently needed items.
- [Start your own fundraiser](#) and encourage your friends and family to join your support efforts.

- Clean out your children's closets and [donate gently used items](#) in youth and teen styles that students would be proud to wear. Please check our donation criteria before dropping off donations.
- [Host a clothing drive](#) with your friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors.
- [Register for the fourth annual Catie's Closet Every Step of the Way virtual 5K](#). The \$30 registration fee will fund the purchase of a brand-new pair of sneakers for a child in need.

Companies that would like to support the 2024 Fill the Bus initiative and achieve its CSR goals can reach out to bethany@catiescloset.org to get started with any of the following:

- Host a company clothing drive.
- Fund Confidence Packs and hold a packing party at your workplace.
- Choose from four sponsorship options that fit your company's goals and values.
- [Register your company as a team in the fourth annual Catie's Closet Every Step of the Way 5K](#). Each participating employee's \$30 registration fee funds the purchase of a brand-new pair of sneakers for a child in need. Increase company participation by covering the registration fee for your employees.

All item donors and drive hosts can arrange a drop-off at the Catie's Closet Distribution Centers in Dracut, East Longmeadow, or Boston, MA.

"Fill the Bus is such a wonderful opportunity to involve corporations and local businesses with our mission," says Bethany Welch, Director of Strategic Partnerships. "Every year, I look forward to working with current and new partners, customizing their engagement events, and seeing how much their employees enjoy helping the students we serve. We have received an incredible response already, and I look forward to introducing Catie's Closet's mission and Fill the Bus to new partners in the community."

The organization's goal for Fill the Bus is to collect 80,000 items total to help stock all in-school closets, including 56 closets in Billerica, Dracut, Lawrence, Lowell, and Tyngsboro, and fulfill more than 500 special orders across all service areas for the start of the school year. Catie's Closet also serves 87 schools in Boston, Western MA, and New Hampshire.

All items collected during Fill the Bus will be distributed to children via Catie's Closet's two signature programs: the In-School Closet Program and SOS Urgent Response Program.

The In-School Closet Program gives students in need a safe and welcoming space inside their schools where they can shop completely free of charge for clothing and other basic necessities. They have complete agency to choose the items that make them feel comfortable and confident.

For children who need additional support, Catie's Closet maintains partnerships with two dozen social service agencies to fill special requests to meet their needs. A child who is served by the SOS Urgent Response Program may be enduring a sudden transition in their stable living conditions, such as being moved to foster care. They may also be victims of a fire or a newcomer to the country with little to no belongings.

When children experiencing poverty, homelessness, or other crises have access to basic needs, they are more able to focus on school and worry less about their challenges. Fill the Bus is an opportunity for the entire community to make a difference for our future generations, together.

Visit catiescloset.org to learn more about Catie's Closet and Fill the Bus.



Photo cutline: NorthPoint Construction Management stands proudly in front of the school bus they filled for Catie's Closet's Fill the Bus initiative in 2023. The company held a community clothing drive and filled the bus with donations they collected. Catie's Closet kicked off its 2024 Fill the Bus initiative on August 1st with opportunities for individuals, families, groups, and companies to donate clothing, school supplies, toiletries, and other basic necessities to support children in need this back-to-school season. Learn all of the ways to get involved at catiescloset.org.

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Established in 2010, Catie's Closet is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that gives students in need life-changing access to clothing and basic necessities. With its In-School Closet Program and SOS Urgent Response Program, the organization serves more than 95,000 students. Catie's Closet is offered in more than 143 schools across 11 school districts in Massachusetts and New Hampshire with distribution centers in Merrimack Valley, Boston, and Western Massachusetts. More information is available at catiescloset.org.