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25 years of KIDS COUNT show long-term gains, losses for kids Michigan's No. 32 ranking calls for focus on education, poverty

LANSING, Mich. — In the 25 years since the launch of the first *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, fewer Michigan teens are having babies and fewer children and teens die each year. During the same period, however, the number of children living in poverty dramatically worsened and Michigan tumbled in education rankings.

The *2014 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released today by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation, marks a quarter-century of bringing attention to national and state-level data on the well-being of children. In this year's report, Michigan is ranked No. 32, placing it behind 31 other states for overall child well-being, down one slot since last year.

"As we mark 25 years of tracking child well-being, it's heartening to know that we've made progress in some key areas, and it's clear that good public policy made a difference," said Gilda Z. Jacobs, president & CEO of the Michigan League for Public Policy, the Michigan partner for KIDS COUNT. "Michigan's overall ranking, however, puts us in the bottom half of the country, and this is not acceptable. We must redouble our efforts to make Michigan a great place to raise a child."

Among recommendations to improve Michigan's child well-being:

- Restore education funding cut since the start of the Great Recession, with a focus on making sure kids can read by the end of third grade.
- Support families earning the least through tax credits and more robust food and cash assistance.
- Increase childcare payments to help working parents.
- Invest in strategies to reduce the 8.4 percent of Michigan babies born too small, particularly in communities of color.

Since the first KIDS COUNT report was released, strong public health education measures dramatically reduced teenage pregnancies. The rate of births per 1,000 Michigan teens improved by 56 percent, falling from 59 births to 26 births per 1,000 teens.

Other progress in that time frame was a 41 percent improvement in the child and teen death rate, in part a result of stronger teen driver laws through a graduated driver's license. In addition, Michigan enjoyed a 41 percent improvement in children living in families where the head of the household lacks a diploma, and a 28 percent improvement in the share of 3- and 4-year-olds not attending preschool. Michigan is poised to improve even more in this area with \$130 million in new funding for the Great Start Readiness Program in this year's and next year's state budget.

Michigan's worsening trends since 1990 included the 39 percent increase in the share of children living in poverty with one in every four children living in poverty. Also worsening was a 36 percent increase in the share of children living in unaffordable housing, defined as consuming 30 percent or more of the household income. More than one in every three kids lives in such a household. In addition, the rate of kids living in single-parent families jumped 30 percent.

This year's ranking of 32nd for overall child well-being places Michigan behind all of its Great Lakes neighbors: Minnesota (5th), Wisconsin (13th), Illinois (20th), Ohio (24th) and Indiana (27th).

The report ranks Michigan in four domains:

- Economic Well-Being: 34th
- Education: 38th
- Health: 29th
- Family and Community: 29th

Michigan's worst ranking was in education. Michigan did poorly on fourth-grade reading, eighth-grade math and on-time graduation, ranking 37th, 38th and 39th among the states. Interventions that will help all children read by the end of third grade are a far better option than retention policies that will force kids to repeat a grade.

"Michigan has been running in place on education, while other states race ahead. Michigan is in the bottom third of states when it comes to education," Jacobs said. "This is clearly an area identified in this report where Michigan must make progress along with lifting up children from poverty. Investing in education and reading by the end of third grade, and restoring the Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit to help working families earning the least, are good places to start."

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

For more information: KIDS COUNT Data Center, which is home to comprehensive national, state and local statistics on child well-being. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Michigan League for Public Policy, www.mlpp.org, is a state level policy institute dedicated to economic opportunity for all.