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The Annie E. Casey Foundation Releases 2015 *KIDS COUNT* Data Book

Rising tide of economic recovery did not lift all boats, leaving many children shipwrecked

Augusta, ME - The Annie E. Casey Foundation released its annual *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* report on child well-being today and ranked Maine 12th among all the states. The 2015 *Data Book*, which focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community. Today, the Casey Foundation reveals that the rising tide of recovery in the form of increasing employment and concentrated wealth has left stagnant pockets of low-income, struggling communities and families, where a child's future is anchored in scarcity and hardship.

For the first time in a decade, a non-New England state ranks number one for overall child well-being. Minnesota holds the top spot, followed by New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Vermont. Arizona, Nevada, Louisiana, New Mexico and Mississippi rank lowest. While three New England states rank within the top five for overall well-being among the 50 states, the top five states in the area of economic well-being are in the heartland and Plain States regions — North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota.

As the number of Maine children living in low-income families expands, at an even more desperate economic level, one in five children is still stranded in poverty. Since 2008, the number of Maine children living in poverty has risen by almost 3,000, from 42,000 to 45,000 children today. At a rate of 18 percent in 2013, the rate of child poverty in Maine is still several percentage points higher than before the recession, when it was 16 percent.

"Maine's economy is not working for all of our children. Too many kids are living in families where no parent has full time work, where housing costs take up a large portion of the family budget, or where wages don't meet the basic needs of a family," said Claire Berkowitz, executive director of the Maine Children's Alliance, which produces the state-level Maine *KIDS COUNT* reports.

"The future of Maine depends on ensuring that the pathways to opportunity are open and accessible throughout the state," Berkowitz added. "When we allow any segment of our community to struggle, particularly our children, that derails progress for all of us."

But, there are bright spots in the 2015 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, with more young children in Maine attending preschool, more high school students graduating on time and proficiency rates improving for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math scores. The teen birth rate is at a historic low and the death rate for children and teens has fallen as a result of medical advances and increased usage of seat belts, car seats and bike helmets.

Economic Well-Being: Between 2008 and 2013, Maine fell behind in two of the four indicators that comprise this domain. Maine ranks 18th in this domain.

- Child poverty: In 2013, 45,000 Maine children (18 percent) lived in poverty, defined as a family of four (two parents/two kids) with income below \$23,624. In 2008, nearly 42,000 Maine children (16 percent) lived in poverty.
- Lack of parental employment: Close to one-third of Maine children now live in households where parents lack full-time, year-round employment. Part-time or sporadic employment does not provide families with the level of income and benefits needed to meet basic needs like rent, food and quality child care.
- High Housing costs: Additionally in 2013, 80,000 Maine children (31 percent) lived in households with high housing cost burdens (spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing), down significantly from 105,000 children (38 percent) in 2008.
- Disconnected youth: In 2013, 4,000 or 6 percent of Maine teens ages 16 to 19 were not working and not in school - also referred to as “disconnected youth.” This indicator has improved since 2008, when 5,000 youth (8 percent) were disconnected.

Education: Maine showed improvement on all four of the indicators that measure this domain. Maine ranks 16th in this domain.

- Preschool enrollment: From 2011 to 2013, an estimated 42 percent of Maine’s three and four year olds were enrolled in preschool, up from 39 percent in 2007-2009. Research shows that when children attend high quality preschool they are more likely to succeed in school later.
- Reading proficiency: With 37 percent of Maine’s 4th graders proficient in reading in 2013 (up slightly from 36 percent in 2007), Maine ranks 18th in the nation on this indicator. Nationally, 34 percent of 4th graders were proficient in reading in 2013, up from 32 percent in 2007.
- Math scores: Maine made significant improvement in 8th grade math scores, with 40 percent of 8th graders proficient, up from 34 percent in 2007. Maine ranks 10th in the nation on this indicator.
- High school graduation rates: Maine showed slight improvement in the percentage of high school students graduating on time. In 2007-08, 86 percent of Maine high school students graduated on time; in 2011-12, that figure rose to 87 percent.

Health: Maine showed improvement on three of four indicators and ranks 10th in this domain.

- Low birth weight: A baby born weighing less than 2,500 grams (5.5 pounds) is considered low birth weight. Between 2008 and 2013, the percentage of low birth weight babies born in Maine increased significantly from 6.7 percent to 7.1 percent of live births. Nationally, 8.0 percent of babies were born low birth weight in 2013, down from 8.2 percent in 2008. Maine now ranks 18th in the nation on this indicator, down from 9th in 2008.
- Access to health care: In 2013, most of Maine’s children had access to medical care and preventative services because 94 percent had health insurance coverage. However, 15,000 Maine children still lacked health benefits, an increase of 3,000 uninsured children from just the previous year. In 2008, approximately 20,000 Maine children (7 percent) were uninsured.
- Child & teen death rate: In 2013, Maine’s child and teen death rate was 25 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 19, down from 2008 when the rate was 27 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 19.
- Teens and substance use: In 2012-2013, 5,000 or 5 percent of Maine teens reported that they abused or were dependent on alcohol or drugs during the last year. This represents a 38 percent decrease from 2007-2008, when 8,000 or 8 percent of teens reported substance abuse or dependence. Because of Maine’s low substance abuse rate among teens, the state ranks first in the nation on this indicator.

Family/Community Context: Maine ranked 5th in this domain, but showed improvement on only one of the four indicators.

- **Single-parenting:** Children growing up in single-parent families typically have access to fewer economic or emotional resources than children in two-parent families. In 2013, 84,000 or 34 percent of Maine children lived in single-parent families, a significant increase from 31 percent in 2008.
- **Parental education:** Higher levels of parental education are strongly associated with better outcomes for children. Maine ranks 2nd on this indicator, with only 5 percent of Maine children living in households headed by an adult without a high school diploma, compared to 14 percent nationally.
- **Concentrated poverty:** Concentrated poverty is defined as neighborhoods where the poverty rate of the total population is 30 percent or more. During the period 2009-2013, 11,000 Maine children (4 percent) lived in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, up from 8,000 Maine children (3 percent) in 2006-2010. Nationally, 14 percent of children lived in high poverty neighborhoods.
- **Teen birth rate:** Between 2008 and 2013, Maine's teen birth rate decreased significantly from 25 births to 17 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. The national teen birth rate decreased during the same time, but remains significantly higher than Maine's at 26 births per 1,000 females in this age group. Maine ranks 6th on this indicator.

For over 25 years, the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* has provided reliable data about how kids are doing locally and nationally and what policies and programs might lead to improvements in child well-being in the nation.

"In order for kids to be successful, they need strong families, good schools, access to health care and safe and supportive communities," Berkowitz said. "The Maine Children's Alliance will continue to use state and national KIDS COUNT data to advocate for sound public policies that improve the lives of our state's children and families."

For more information:

The 2015 edition *KIDS COUNT Data Book* includes the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information will be available on the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](http://www.kidscount.org), which also contains the most recent data on hundreds of other measures of child well-being.

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The [Maine Children's Alliance \(MCA\)](http://www.mekids.org) advocates for sound public policies that improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine. For more information, visit us at www.mekids.org or follow us on Twitter @MEChildren and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/MEChildren).