



## MISSISSIPPI KIDS COUNT

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**UNDER EMBARGO until Wednesday, June 27 at 12:01 am ET**

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**Mississippi Ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in Children’s Well-being, the Highest in More than a Quarter Century**  
*Despite gains, progress is threatened by potential U.S. Census undercount, and work must continue to secure a brighter future for state’s children*

STARKVILLE, Mississippi — For the first time in nearly 30 years, Mississippi has improved its ranking for overall child well-being, according to new data released in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s annual *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*. Thirteen of the 16 *Data Book* indicators used to rank states in the areas of economic well-being, education, health, and family and community show slight improvements, moving the state into the 48<sup>th</sup> position for the first time since 1991.

“The gains in each of the four domains reflect the continued benefit to children from federally funded programs and increasing parental employment,” said Mississippi KIDS COUNT Co-Director Dr. Linda H. Southward.

However, Southward provided an additional caution. “At the same time, we know that many children, particularly children of color, continue to live in poverty and suffer from a lack of resources. The research is clear that when states enact an earned income tax credit, the percentage of children and families living in poverty decreases. This policy, coupled with investments in high-quality early care and education programs, would set the stage for Mississippi to continue to improve its overall rankings on child well-being.”

The annual KIDS COUNT Data Book uses 16 indicators to review the progress made by each state and rank them across four areas of well-being — economic, education, health, and family and community.

- Benefitting from the stronger national economy, Mississippi experienced the greatest improvements in **economic well-being**, ranking 48<sup>th</sup>. Since 2010, children whose parents lack secure employment improved from 39 percent to 34 percent. There was also improvement seen in the number of children living in households with a high housing cost burden. However, the child poverty rate of 30 percent, or 211,000 children, still shows that Mississippi’s children have one of the worst poverty outcomes in the nation.
- In **education**, Mississippi ranked 44<sup>th</sup>. High school students not graduating on time showed the greatest improvement, dropping from 25 percent to 18 percent in the past year. Fourth-graders not proficient in reading and eighth-graders not proficient in math revealed slight positive changes.
- Mississippi ranked 47<sup>th</sup> in **health**. The percent of Mississippi children without health insurance rose from 4 percent in 2015 to 5 percent in 2016.
- Mississippi continues to rank at the bottom of the nation in the **family and community** domain at 50<sup>th</sup>. There were slight improvements seen in the number of teen births (from 55 per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2010 to 33 per 1,000 females in 2016) and children living in high poverty areas. Still, during 2012-2016, 26% of children in

Mississippi lived in a high poverty area, which can greatly impact future outcomes through a lack of exposure to resources that promote early childhood development.

### **Potential Threat Posed by 2020 Census Undercount**

The *2018 Data Book* also warns policymakers and child advocates of troubling consequences for the nation's kids with the likely undercount, nationwide, of about one million children under five in the 2020 Census. The 2010 survey had the worst undercount since 1950, with nearly five percent of children under five not counted.

Children of color, low-income children and children in immigrant families are the least likely to be counted and stand to suffer the most if vital programs face reductions in funding. Roughly 300 federal programs use census-derived data to allocate more than \$800 billion a year.

"All people—including children—have the right to be counted and be represented in our democracy. But with no real political or economic power, young children rely on adults to protect and advocate for them," said Casey Foundation president and CEO Patrick McCarthy. "A major Census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms and more kids without health care."

With the highest percentage population of African-Americans and one of the highest percentages of child poverty in the nation, Mississippi is at great risk of significant undercount of children and to losing substantial funding for program support. Based on Census counts, more than \$2 billion is allocated annually to Mississippi through federal programs to benefit children.

"All stakeholders must come together to make fully counting young children a priority issue as planning time for the census 2020 is rapidly fleeting," said Dr. Heather Hanna, Mississippi KIDS COUNT Co-Director. "It's not too late to ensure we conduct a Census that leads to proper funding, representation and programs for the continued healthy development of kids."

### **Release Information**

The *2018 KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the Data Book can use the *KIDS COUNT* Data Center at [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org).

### **About Mississippi KIDS COUNT**

Mississippi *KIDS COUNT* is part of the national *KIDS COUNT* network of state-based organizations supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information about Mississippi *KIDS COUNT*, visit [www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu](http://www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu).

### **About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

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](http://www.aecf.org). *KIDS COUNT*® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.