



PRESS RELEASE

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KIDS COUNT Data Book: NM Drops to 50th in Nation in Child Well-Being Seven Years of Austerity Have Moved State in Wrong Direction

ALBUQUERQUE, NM— New Mexico is ranked dead last in the nation for child well-being, ranking 50th in the national *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book*, which is set for release on Wednesday, June 27 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. New Mexico ranked 50th once before, in 2013.

“New Mexico’s dismal ranking should serve as a wake-up call to our state that we must act—and that action must be comprehensive and sustained,” said James Jimenez, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, the KIDS COUNT anchor for New Mexico. “While most of the other states saw progress on child well-being, New Mexico actually got worse on several key indicators. The data show we are at a crossroads—we can continue to disinvest in our children or we can insist upon a new direction, one in which we make a deep commitment to improving conditions for all New Mexicans.”

The annual *Data Book* ranks the 50 states on 16 indicators of child well-being, which include measures like the child poverty rate, reading proficiency among fourth-graders, and teen birth rates, among others. The indicators are organized under four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community. Louisiana ranked 49th this year and New Hampshire took the top spot.

New Mexico’s child poverty rate increased from 29 percent in last year’s *Data Book* to 30 percent, meaning an additional 4,000 children living below the 2016 federal poverty line of \$24,339 for a family of four. Meanwhile, the national child poverty rate improved, dropping by 2 percentage points. An additional 5,000 New Mexico children are also living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment—an

increase of 2 percentage points over last year's *Data Book*. As with child poverty, the national average on this indicator also improved.

"Poverty during childhood acts as a road block to opportunity for kids and when they don't have access to the opportunities children need to grow up healthy, they are far less likely to thrive," said Amber Wallin, NM Voices deputy director. "When we ensure that all children can reach their potential, we all benefit."

New Mexico has back-slid in the one area where the state was doing well in last year's *Data Book*—health insurance. "New Mexico had a high rate of children without health insurance for many years, but in last year's *Data Book*, we actually were doing better than the nation as a whole," said Wallin, who also oversees the KIDS COUNT program for NM Voices. "We attributed that to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, but we've lost some of the ground we had gained."

In the 2017 *Data Book*, New Mexico ranked 16th in the nation on the children's health insurance indicator, with just 4 percent of children lacking health insurance. This year's *Data Book* ranks the state at 33rd with 5 percent of children uninsured—meaning 4,000 children lost their health insurance between 2015 and 2016. At the national level, the trend was the inverse, with the rate of uninsured children improving from 5 percent to 4 percent.

New Mexico did see a few bright spots in this year's *Data Book* over last year's. The rate of children not attending preschool dropped from 58 percent to 57 percent, which bumped our ranking from 33rd in the nation to 31st.

New Mexico's teen birth rate also improved. This year's *Data Book* has New Mexico moving from 46th in the nation to 44th with the teen birth rate dropping from 35 births per 1,000 female teens to 30 births per 1,000. In the 2012 *Data Book* New Mexico's rate was more than double that (64 per 1,000) and we ranked 49th in the nation.

"We believe our steady drop in child well-being is directly related to the past seven years of austerity policies that have starved our schools and health systems of critical sources of funding," Wallin said. "Much of that money went to tax cuts for the well-connected that have failed dismally to create jobs. It is definitely time to change the path we're on and make the investments that will help our hard-working families and their children thrive. Nothing less is at stake than the future of our state."

The theme of this year's *Data Book* is the 2020 decennial census and the high likelihood of an undercount due to the addition of a citizenship question. Since the decennial census is used to determine congressional and state legislative districts and the allocation of billions of dollars in federal funds, an undercount has serious repercussions for a state. "An undercount could devastate New Mexico," said Wallin. "The populations that are most likely to be undercounted—immigrants, people who live in rural areas,

and people of color, especially Native Americans—are all populations that New Mexico has in abundance. Congress must act to block the citizenship question from the census.”

Release Information

The *2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org.

Additional information is available at 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.

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About New Mexico Voices for Children

KIDS COUNT is a program of New Mexico Voices for Children and is made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities. 625 Silver Ave. SW, Suite 195, Albuquerque, NM 87102; 505-244-9505 (p); www.nmvoices.org

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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