

UNDER EMBARGO until Wednesday, June 27 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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**One Million Missing: Undercount of Young Children in 2020 Census Threatens
Nationwide Gains in Child Well-Being**

*2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book reveals improved child outcomes but warns of decade of
damage from inaccurate census*

BALTIMORE — The Annie E. Casey Foundation today warned policymakers and child advocates of troubling consequences for the nation’s kids with the likely undercount of about 1 million children under five in the 2020 census, as the Foundation released the [2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book](#), its annual look at child well-being in the United States.

In this year’s *Data Book*, the Foundation noted that about 4.5 million young children live in neighborhoods where there’s a high risk of missing kids in the count. ([Editors: State data are available](#)). An undercount of young children in the upcoming decennial census would short-change child well-being over the next decade by putting at risk hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding for programs that are critical to family stability and opportunity.

“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” 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.”

Roughly 300 federal programs use census-derived data to allocate more than \$800 billion a year. However, census outreach efforts face daunting challenges: a lack of leadership, the first-ever digital survey, and the potential of suppressed participation due to a citizenship question. The undercount of young children has worsened with every census since 1980. The 2010 survey had the worst undercount since 1950, with nearly five percent of children under five — about 1 million kids — not counted.

If missed in the national count, children of color, low-income children and children in immigrant families stand to suffer the most if vital programs face reductions in funding. Research shows that by 2020 the majority of children in the United States will be children of color.

“We will count on children of all races and ethnicities to build America’s future, so the country must count *all* children in this upcoming census, so we can direct funding to meet their needs,” said McCarthy. “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. But it’s up to policymakers, communities and the nation to make sure that every kid is counted and matters.”

National Trends in Child Well-Being

The *Data Book* draws from numerous sources to focus on key trends in the post-recession years. It measures child well-being in four domains: economic, education, health, and family and community. This year’s *Data Book* shows upward trends in many aspects of child well-being, particularly in economic indicators. However, there are mixed results or stalled progress in the other domains. Troubling disparities persist among children of color and those from low-income and immigrant families. However, the data show improvements since 2010 in many factors that lead to children’s healthy development.

A stronger economy is producing better outcomes for parents and their kids. The *Data Book* shows that about 1.6 million fewer children are living in poverty than five years ago, more parents are employed and fewer families are spending a disproportionate amount of their income on housing costs. Nonetheless, in 2016, one in five children lived in poverty and 13 percent of kids lived in a high-poverty neighborhood. Moreover, there has been no progress in the percentage of teens who are neither working nor in school.

In child health, the nation saw a slight uptick in the percentage of children with health insurance, a result of the combination of key provisions and expansions for public health programs, but little else changed significantly. The nation saw the teen birth rate drop between 2010 and 2016 to its lowest level ever.

The nation’s graduation rate is at an all-time high with 84 percent of high school students graduating on time. There has been slight progress in the percentage of fourth-graders reading at or above grade level, but the percentage of eighth-graders proficient in math and the percentage of three- and four-year-olds enrolled in school has remained stagnant.

State Rankings in the 2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book

Five of the top 10 states for overall child well-being are in the Northeast, with New Hampshire first and Massachusetts second.

- New Jersey ranked third. Although this year’s rankings and last year’s are not directly comparable because of changes in methodology, and although changes in methodology and data availability have occurred regularly across the 29 years of the *Data Book* project, New Jersey had never ranked higher than fourth.
- Minnesota (4), Iowa (5), Utah (6), Connecticut (7), Vermont (8), Nebraska (9) and Virginia (10) round out the top ten.
- Mississippi saw slight improvements in almost every indicator. It ranks 48th, its highest ranking in more than a quarter century (1991).

- The five states with the lowest overall child well-being rankings are Alaska (46), Nevada (47), Mississippi (48), Louisiana (49) and New Mexico (50).

Investing in an Accurate Count to Yield a Positive Future for Kids

Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and advocacy at the Casey Foundation, said reliable data, particularly census data, are critical to informing decisions that improve the lives of America’s children. “An inaccurate census threatens to undermine essential resources for communities and erode many of the advancements made in recent years for our children — particularly children of color — for years to come,” Speer said.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation offered the following recommendations to achieve a more accurate census:

- **Maximize the Census Bureau’s capacity:** Federal legislators need to fully fund the census outreach effort, and the administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency to provide support for a more accurate census than in 2010.
- **Fund state and local outreach:** State and local governments and community organizations need to invest in educational outreach around the census to ensure that the most vulnerable communities are counted.
- **Expand the pool of trusted messengers:** Broaden the circle of people (from child care providers to members of the clergy) and organizations (from public schools to libraries) who can provide outreach in their communities to reach hard-to-count households and encourage participation among people most likely to be missed.
- **Address the digital divide:** Provide online access for all families to participate in the census, either in local libraries or schools.
- **Address privacy and confidentiality concerns:** Given the growing distrust and fear of online data breaches, it is critical that government officials ensure the protection of respondents’ data.

The Casey Foundation asserts that this will require a concerted effort by the federal executive branch, Congress, state and local officials, advocates, businesses, service providers, community leaders and philanthropy.

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. 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.

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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.