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Illinois' Progress on Child and Family Well-Being Imperiled by Pandemic

Hopes for a Recovery Remain, but Data Show Persistent Racial and Ethnic Disparities, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

CHICAGO — Child poverty in Illinois decreased across all racial and ethnic groups before the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**. The 50-state report of recent household data, developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, analyzes how families have fared between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis. The release of the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** precedes the annual Illinois KIDS COUNT® Report being released by Voices for Illinois Children.

This year's national *Data Book* and forthcoming Illinois report show nearly a decade of progress could be reversed by the COVID-19 pandemic unless state and federal officials provide the resources to sustain improvements as we exit the pandemic.

In addition to overall decreases in poverty, Illinois children in 2019 saw improvements in reading and math proficiency. Fewer children also lived in areas of high poverty, and their parents were less frequently unemployed and overburdened by housing costs. The Illinois report notes that despite some gains, child poverty rates in Illinois prior to the pandemic remained a significant problem.

"The data on Illinois children are encouraging," said Dr. Bill Byrnes, KIDS COUNT project manager at Voices for Illinois Children. "However, we do not yet know the full impact that COVID-19 will have on Illinois children, particularly poor children of color. In 2019, 16% of Illinois children lived below the poverty level, which is unacceptable. Illinois legislators must work quickly to ensure that the needs of all children in the state are met even after the pandemic ends."

The *Data Book* shows simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would shortchange millions of kids and fail to address persistent racial and ethnic disparities.

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context — are used by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in each year's *Data Book* to assess child well-being. The annual KIDS COUNT data and rankings represent the most recent information available but do not capture the impact of the past year:

- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** In 2019, 436,000 Illinois children lived in households with an income below the poverty line. However, Black children lived below the federal poverty level at a rate of 34%, more than two times that of the state rate (16%), while Latino/a children were below poverty level at a rate of 20% and white children at 9%.
- **EDUCATION:** From 2017 to 2019, 45% of children in Illinois ages 3 and 4 were not in school. Young Latino/a children were not in school at a rate of 53%, the only group to exceed the state rate.
- **HEALTH:** In 2010, 162,000 children did not have health insurance. By 2019, that number had decreased by 20% to 120,000. However, Latino/a (6%) and Black (5%) children lacked health insurance at higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In 2019, 217,000 children lived in high poverty areas. For Black children, this rate was 30%, compared with white (non-Latino/a) children at a rate of 2%.

Household Pulse Survey data from the last year add to the story of Illinois' children and families in this moment:

- During the pandemic, in 2020, 9% of adults in Illinois with children in the household lacked health insurance.
- In 2020, 23% of households with children in Illinois had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment on time. This number decreased to 19% in March 2021.
- In April/May of 2020, 66% of adults with children in the households reported being employed in the past week, but in March 2021 that number had decreased to 64%.

These data indicate that although there has been improvement in some areas, Illinois families and children will still need a significant amount of support once the pandemic ends.

Investing in children, families and communities is a priority to ensure an equitable and expansive recovery. Several of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's suggestions have already been enacted in the American Rescue Plan, and additional recommendations include:

- **Congress should make the expansion of the child tax credit permanent.** The child tax credit has long had bipartisan support, so lawmakers should find common cause and ensure the largest one-year drop ever in child poverty is not followed by a surge.
- **State and local governments should prioritize the recovery of hard-hit communities of color.**
- **States should expand income support that helps families care for their children.** Permanently extending unemployment insurance eligibility to contract, gig and other workers and expanding state tax credits would benefit parents and children.
- **States that have not done so should expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.** The American Rescue Plan offers incentives to do so.
- **States should strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.**

Release Information

The *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 21 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.

Voices for Illinois Children will release an Executive Summary of the 2021 Illinois KIDS COUNT report on June 21, followed by the full report on July 19.

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About Voices for Illinois Children, Powered by YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

Voices for Illinois Children is part of YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, an Illinois-based 501c3 organization, and champions strong public policies and investments for all children in our state. For more information, visit www.voices4kids.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.

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