

# DRAFT



people • partnerships • policy [massbudget.org](http://massbudget.org)

**UNDER EMBARGO Until Monday, June 21, 2021 at 12:01 a.m. ET**

Contact: Reginald Williams, [rwilliams@massbudget.org](mailto:rwilliams@massbudget.org), 617-970-5060

## **Envisioning Equity for our Children: How COVID-19 Impacted Child and Family Well-Being in the Commonwealth**

**BOSTON** — Although Massachusetts ranks No.1 nationally in overall child well-being, according to the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** released today, a deeper dive into the data shows that not all the state’s children are doing well. As the data show, Massachusetts’ children fared unevenly before the pandemic, and the past year has made the situation worse for many. This year’s *Data Book*, a 50-state report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows nearly a decade of progress could be erased by the pandemic unless policymakers act boldly to sustain the beginnings of a recovery.

In education and health care, areas where Massachusetts has made significant investment in the past, the *Data Book* ranks the state well. In other areas the state performs poorly. Before the pandemic, 334,000 children lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment, putting Massachusetts 20th nationally on this measure; 419,000 children lived in households spending more than 30% of their income on housing, ranking Massachusetts 42nd.

During the pandemic, circumstances have gotten worse — particularly in Black and brown communities. Survey data show that in 2020, while one in ten households with children in Massachusetts sometimes or often reported not having enough food to eat, the number was double that for Black and Latinx households. One-fifth of households with children had little confidence in being able to pay their rent or mortgage. The number was as high as one in *three* for Black households and slightly higher for Latinx households.

Even though more recent survey data suggest that Massachusetts is now on a path to recovery, the recovery is uneven and more precarious still for children in Massachusetts’ under-resourced communities.

“In order to guarantee the well-being of *all* our children and families in the Commonwealth, we must pass policies that go beyond recovery and create the foundation for a truly equitable future for our children,” said Marie-Frances Rivera, President of MassBudget, home of KIDS COUNT in Massachusetts. “The data are clear — we can achieve positive outcomes if we make necessary and targeted investments. It is imperative that we make our recovery equitable for our Black, brown, and historically under-resourced communities most in need.”

# DRAFT

The *Data Book* shows that simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would shortchange millions of kids nationally 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:** Massachusetts ranked 16th nationally, when looking at measures such as child poverty, parental employment, housing costs and teenagers not in school or not working;
- **EDUCATION:** Massachusetts ranked 2nd nationally, measuring preschool attendance, fourth grade reading, eighth grade math and high school graduation rates;
- **HEALTH:** Massachusetts ranked 1st nationally, based on infant birth weights, child health insurance rates, child and teen death rates and pre-teen and teen obesity rates;
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** Massachusetts ranked 9th nationally, based on teen birth rates, on the percentage of children growing up in single-parent families, on the percentage of children growing up where the household heads lack a high school diploma, and on the percentage of children growing up in high poverty neighborhoods.

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 federal 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 that directly 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. Massachusetts has already expanded Medicaid, yet there are still opportunities to bring this critical health insurance coverage to the low-income children still excluded from the program.
- **States should strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.**

# DRAFT

## **Release Information**

The *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 21 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). Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the Data Book can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at [www.datacenter.kidscount.org](http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org).

## **About MassBudget**

The Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MassBudget) is a leading think tank advancing policy solutions to create an inclusive, thriving Commonwealth for all. For more information, visit [www.massbudget.org](http://www.massbudget.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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

###