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Maine Children's Alliance

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

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Child Well-being in Maine Imperiled by the Pandemic

Data Across 50 States Show Concerns for Child Poverty, But Hopes for Recovery Remain, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

AUGUSTA, Maine — Maine ranks 11th overall in child well-being, according to *the 2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, after being thirteenth in 2020. The *Data Book* is a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, analyzing how families have fared between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis.

This year's *Data Book* shows nearly a decade of progress nationally could be erased by the COVID-19 pandemic, unless policymakers act boldly to sustain the beginnings of a recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

Maine remained a state leader in family and community indicators, ranking fourth overall, and tied for first with just 4% of households with children headed by a person who lacks a high school degree. In economic security, Maine ranks 15th, as other states made greater one-year improvements in the rate of poverty, while Maine held at 14% from 2018 to 2019. In education, Maine ranks 18th with a high school graduation rate of 87%, one percentage point above the national average. And in the health domain, Maine comes in 12th, showing improvement since the 2017-2018 survey in teens ages 10 to 17 who have a healthy body weight (neither obese or overweight).

"In 2017, Maine had the highest reduction in child poverty of any state and held steady for the latest child poverty data in 2019," said Stephanie Eglinton, executive director of the Maine Children's Alliance and a member of the KIDS COUNT network. "This year's *Data Book* indicates Maine needs to continue to implement policy solutions to address child poverty, like expanding tax credits, increasing living wages and making housing affordable to work toward lifting the 33,000 children and their families out of poverty in our state."

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community contexts — 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: 33,000 children (14%) lived in households with an income below the poverty line in Maine in 2019.
- Education: 14,000 young children ages 3 to 4 (54%) were not enrolled in preschool in Maine in 2019

DRAFT

- Affordable Health Care: 15,000 children (5%) did not have health insurance in Maine in 2019.
- Family and Community: 10,000 children (4%) lived in families where the head of household did not have a high school degree in 2019.

The Foundation analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey between April 23, 2020 to December 21, 2020 and compared it with more recent survey data from March 3 to March 29, 2021 to understand how the pandemic was affecting households with children and to see if there was evidence of recovery. Survey data from the last year add to the story of how Maine children and families are faring in this crisis:

- **Eight percent of adults** in Maine with children in the household lacked health insurance in April to December 2020. However, by March 2021, this figure had fallen to 6%, suggesting the beginnings of a recovery.
- **One in five adults** in households with children in Maine said they felt down, depressed, or hopeless in the months following the pandemic in 2020. This figure improved by March 2021 and stood at 16%.
- **Fourteen percent of households with children** enrolled in public or private school (k-12) in Maine in April to December 2020 indicated that the internet and a computer or digital device were not usually or always available for children for educational purposes.

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.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is the most extraordinary crisis to hit families in decades," said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Deliberate policy decisions can help them recover, and we're already seeing the beginnings of that. Policymakers should use this moment to repair the damage the pandemic has caused — and to address long-standing inequities it has exacerbated."

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.

DRAFT

- **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.

About the Maine Children’s Alliance

The Maine Children’s Alliance is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates for sound public policies and promotes best practices to improve the lives of Maine children, youth, and families. Learn more at www.mekids.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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