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Minnesota Ranks Third Overall for Children's Well-Being, but Fault Lines in Systems Exacerbated by Pandemic; Black, Indigenous and Children of Color Experience Vast Disparities in Outcomes

KIDS COUNT Data Book provides the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States

SAINT PAUL, Minnesota — Minnesota ranked third among states for overall child well-being, improving in health and education rankings but falling in the Family and Community domain from 2020, according to the latest edition of the national *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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

"While we are happy that Minnesota is ranked third based on the *KIDS COUNT* indicators, when we disaggregate the data by race and ethnicity, we find that our Black, Indigenous and children of color are having a very different experience of Minnesota. Our state has some of the most pronounced disparities in outcomes for the children," said Bharti Wahi, executive director of Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota (CDF-MN). "As we move out of the pandemic and take a look at our long-standing disparities, we have an obligation to rebuild a stronger and more equitable Minnesota where marginalized children can flourish, policymakers center child and youth well-being, and communities wield power to make change."

The *Data Book* shows simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would shortchange millions of children and fail to address persistent racial and ethnic disparities. Even with an overall Minnesota rank of three (rankings based on 2019 information and without the negative compounding consequences of the pandemic), too many Minnesota children are not receiving the support they need to thrive:

- 143,000 lived below the poverty line (\$25,000 for a family with two adults and two children)
- 261,000 lived in a household where no adult had full-time, year-round income
- 268,000 were in unaffordable housing (30% or more of income)
- 74,000 (or more than half) of Minnesota 3- and 4-year-olds were not in school (a rank of 18th)
- 42,000 did not have health insurance

COVID-19 has hit Minnesota households with children, particularly Black, Indigenous and communities of color, harder than those without and public programs and policies have been an even more critical bridge to family economic stability — benefitting children across the state.

During 2021, CDF-MN has encouraged policymakers to continue the extraordinary leadership and vital public investments in families necessary to meet this moment and to support families going forward in the following ways:

- Supporting economic stability for 64,000 children on the Minnesota Family Investment Program through increased flexibility, coordination and simplification of program requirements and inflationary annual adjustments;
- Creating a more equitable unemployment insurance system that includes hardworking high school youth that support themselves and their families;
- Ensuring an equitable recovery from remote learning through investments in culturally relevant and affirming out of school time programs, non-exclusionary discipline models and greater diversity in the teaching workforce;
- Expanding access to Medicaid coverage for a year post-partum and tackling implicit bias in maternal health care;
- Addressing racial and geographic economic and health disparities through a Paid Family and Medical Leave social insurance program; and
- Using federal and state resources and a state mandated process to transform a fragmented and underfunded childcare system.

CDF-MN plans to build upon these and other legislative and administrative advocacy efforts in the future to ensure the state’s budget and policies put children and families first. “Particularly as we build a post COVID-19 state, overcoming the economic crisis and contending with the racial reckoning, we want to send a strong message to communities that we support children and families through critical investments, and the benefits of these investments far outweigh the costs to ensure that every child in Minnesota has a fair and equitable start in life,” said Wahi.

The *2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States. 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:

- Third in economic well-being. While up to the pandemic Minnesota’s families experienced significant progress in economic security, 143,000 children were still living in poverty and their ranks likely swelled during the pandemic as economic stability and security declined.
- Seventh in education. Only 48% of children ages 3 and 4 attend preschool despite widespread research pointing to the positive impact that high-quality early childhood education has on long-term educational outcomes. Increased state and federal investment in recent years has improved access, but we must do more to address shortages in high-quality early childhood education opportunities and the affordability of these programs.
- Sixth in the family and community domain. Teen birth rates are at an all-time low nationwide, and while Minnesota rates remain low, progress has stalled, with 1,791 births to 15-19-year-olds in 2019.
- Second in health. As of 2019, Minnesota’s rates are among the highest in the nation in regard to the percentage of children who are covered by health insurance, though 42,000 children remain uncovered and sharp disparities exist for Latino and American Indian children. We expect the pandemic to exacerbate the need and disparities.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey from the last year add to the story of COVID-19's impact on Minnesota's children and families:

- Around half (46%) of Minnesotans in households with children lost income since March 2020.
- An estimated 341,000 Minnesotans with children in their household have benefitted from Unemployment Insurance (UI) since March, but another 64,000 applied and were unable to access the program.
- Since March, Minnesota households with children are twice as likely as those without children to report food insufficiency within the past seven days.
- Access to paid leave to care for oneself or a family member is more important than ever, yet 73% of Minnesotans in households with children that were not working in late August were receiving no pay.

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 post-secondary 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 Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota

Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota releases an annual state KIDS COUNT Data Book each fall. Download the [2020 Minnesota KIDS COUNT Data Book](#). The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

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.

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