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

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Rhode Island Ranks 23rd in Child Well-Being in 50-State Data Report – The Smallest State Leads in Health, but Falls Short in Family & Community and Education Rankings

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Smart Policy Decisions Could Sustain Beginnings of Recovery and Close Equity Gaps

Providence, RI (June 21, 2021) — Rhode Island performed well on access to health care but is falling short on housing affordability and curbing child hunger, according to the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, 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 could be erased by the COVID-19 pandemic unless policymakers act boldly to sustain the beginnings of a recovery from the coronavirus crisis. Data from surveys confirm that households with children were hit especially hard during the pandemic in 2020 but that the U.S. appeared to be experiencing the start of a recovery in the first months of 2021. Yet the figures from this year's *Data Book* illustrate that 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.

According to the *Data Book*, Rhode Island ranked 23rd overall in child well-being.

- Health ranking: 9
- Economic Well-Being ranking: 17
- Family and Community ranking: 28
- Education ranking: 34

“The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on stark economic, education and other disparities and challenges to children’s success,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “We call on lawmakers to prioritize equitable solutions to ensure that children and families can move forward with the health, educational and economic supports they need to thrive. Now that we are turning the corner on the pandemic, we need to ensure that long-term supports are in place that will yield the best outcomes for Rhode Island’s children and families, particularly families of color who were hardest hit by the pandemic and the resulting economic impact.”

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:

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- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** In 2019, 14% (28,000) of Rhode Island children lived in households with incomes below the poverty level.
- **EDUCATION:** In 2019, 55% (13,000) of young children in Rhode Island were not in school.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** In 2019, 2% (4,000) of Rhode Island children did not have health insurance.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In 2019, 12% (25,000) of Rhode Island children lived in high-poverty areas.

Survey data from the last year add to the story of Rhode Island’s children and families in this moment:

- **Continuing need for food assistance:** During the pandemic in 2020, 15% of Rhode Island households with children reported that they sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past two weeks, and as recently as March 2021, this figure had worsened to 17%.
- **Continuing need for housing supports:** During the pandemic, in 2020, 23% of Rhode Island households with children had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment, and as recently as March 2021, this figure had worsened to 26%.
 - **For both food and housing issues in Rhode Island, large disparities exist, with the highest needs among Black and Latino households.**
- **Mental health is rebounding** – During the pandemic, in 2020, 22% of Rhode Island adults living in households with children reported that they felt down, depressed, or hopeless, but by March 2021, this figure had fallen to 14%, suggesting that families’ mental health is improving as the pandemic lifts.

“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.**

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- **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.

About Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity. For more information, visit www.rikidscount.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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