



UNDER EMBARGO Until August 8, 2022, at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: Tawana Jacobs | tjacobs@dckids.org | 301-325-8687

D.C. Lags Behind Maryland and Virginia in Child Well-Being

23% of D.C. children are in families below the poverty line compared to 12% in Maryland, 13% in Virginia and 17% nationally

Washington, D.C. — The impact of a two-and-a-half year-long pandemic and inflation are affecting children and families nationwide. Children and youth in the District of Columbia are faring no different. According to the **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring, a greater share of children in the District live below the poverty line than their peers in Maryland and Virginia.

The report highlights how the pre-pandemic challenges facing DC children and their peers across America have pushed many into an unprecedented mental health crisis. It concurs with a recent assessment by the U.S. surgeon general that conditions amount to a youth “*mental health pandemic.*”

“We know that the measure of child well-being in the District is primarily driven by how well Black and Latino children are doing,” stated Kimberly Perry, executive director of DC Action, a national KIDS COUNT network member. “There is a clear economic disparity between the number of Black and Latino children living below the poverty line (36% and 14%, respectively) when compared to white children (1%). Families here pay more for housing and child care than in Maryland and Virginia. Plus, nearly 40% of children in the District live in families that depend on seasonal employment, compared to 27% nationally and 23% in Maryland and Virginia,” Perry continued.

The *Data Book* reports that children across America, in more than 40 states and the District of Columbia, were more likely to encounter anxiety or depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis. The national figure jumped 26%, from 9.4% of children ages 3-17 (5.8 million) to 11.8% (7.3 million) between 2016 and 2020, the year COVID-19 swept across the United States. This increase represents 1.5 million more children struggling to make it through the day.

Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionate troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color. Nine percent of high schoolers overall but 12% of Black students, 13% of students of two or more races, and 26% of American Indian or Native Alaskan high schoolers attempted suicide in the year previous to the most recent federal survey. Further, many LGBTQ young people encounter challenges as they seek mental health support. Among heterosexual high school students of all races and ethnicities, 6% attempted suicide; the share was 23% for gay, lesbian or bisexual students.

Each year, the *Data Book* presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health and family and community factors — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. The data in this year’s report are a mix of pre-pandemic and more recent figures and are the latest available.

“Most District lawmakers are keenly aware of how the pandemic and current economic conditions affect children and families. At DC Action, we will add the findings of this report to our arsenal of data to advocate for policies and resources that are proven to improve outcomes for Black and Latinx children who face long-standing systemic challenges,” concluded Perry.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation calls for lawmakers to heed the surgeon general’s warning and respond by developing programs and policies to ease mental health burdens on children and their families. They urge policymakers to:

- **Prioritize meeting kids’ basic needs.** Youth who grow up in poverty are two to three times more likely to develop mental health conditions than their peers. Children need a solid foundation of nutritious food, stable housing and safe neighborhoods — and their families need financial stability — to foster positive mental health and wellness.
- **Ensure every child has access to the mental health care they need, when and where they need it.** Schools should increase the presence of social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals on staff and strive to meet the 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors recommended by the American School Counselor Association. They can work with local health care providers and local and state governments to make additional federal resources available and coordinate treatment.
- **Bolster mental health care that takes into account young people’s experiences and identities.** It should be trauma-informed — designed to promote a child’s healing and emotional security — and culturally relevant to the child’s life. It should be informed by the latest evidence and research and should be geared toward early intervention, which can be especially important in the absence of a formal diagnosis of mental illness.

###

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book will be available 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 <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

ABOUT DC ACTION

[DC Action](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization working to make the District of Columbia a place where all kids grow up safe, resilient, powerful and heard. It is home to [DC Kids Count](#), Under 3 DC, DC Out-of-School Time Coalition, the DC Home Visiting Council, and the Youth Economic Justice and Housing Coalition, which brings that power forward, creating space for children, youth and their families to raise their voices to make change.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young children, youth and young adults 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.

###