

UNDER EMBARGO Until June 14, 2023 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact:
Mara Powell
mpowell@kyyouth.org

Kentucky Ranks 40th in Child Well-Being While Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care Deeply Impacts Families and Economy

Data Show Child Care Challenges Caused Over 1 in 9 Kentucky Parents to Miss, Quit, or Scale Back Work, the Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

LOUISVILLE, KY – Kentucky ranks 40th in child well-being, according to the **2023 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. The report also explores how the lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes parents to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care are paying dearly for it.

“When we think about the children in our child care centers today, we must think about them as the high school graduation classes of 2035 to 2040, as entering the workforce and fueling Kentucky’s future economy, as well as the parents of our next generation of little ones. We must also ask, who is caring for and educating these kiddos so they have the best possible chance to thrive in adolescence and into adulthood? Our early childhood educators are the caretakers behind the caretakers and the workforce behind the workforce – we should and must honor that,” said **Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates**.

The *Data Book* reports that too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. In 2020-21, 12% of Kentucky children under age 6 lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. And women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

Even if parents can find an opening at child care near their home, they often can’t pay for it. Kentucky’s average cost of center-based child care for toddlers in 2021 was \$7,162, which is 8% of a couple’s median income and 27% of a single mother’s income in the state.

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are paid worse than 98% of professions. The median pay for child care workers in Kentucky was \$28,300 per year or \$12.39 an hour in 2022, which is significantly less than the median national wage for retail (\$14.26) and customer service (\$18.16) workers.

The failings of the child care market also affect the current and future health of Kentucky’s economy, costing the state \$1.2 billion a year in lost earnings, productivity, and tax revenue, according to one

study. All of these challenges put parents under tremendous stress to meet the dual responsibilities of providing for their families and ensuring their children are safe and nurtured.

“Without safe child care they can afford and get to, parents face impossible choices, affecting not only their families, but their employers as well,” Brooks continues. “These consistent challenges facing the child care infrastructure – accessibility, cost, and low wages for the workforce – impact the Commonwealth’s economy, parents’ ability to advance in careers, and the early learning of our youngest Kentuckians.”

Additionally, 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. The latest report ranks Kentucky:

- **41st in Economic Well-Being:** In 2021, 22% of Kentucky children lived in households with an income below the federal poverty line and one in three children (33%) lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment.
- **29th in Education:** In 2017-2021, 60% of 3- and 4-year-olds in Kentucky were not enrolled in a nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten program. In 2022, 69% of Kentucky fourth graders scored below proficient reading levels and 79% of eighth graders scored below proficient in math.
- **40th in Health:** In 2021, nearly one in 10 babies (9.1%) were born at low birthweight. In 2020-2021, 41% of children and teens ages 10-17 were overweight or obese – ranking the Commonwealth 48th in the nation.
- **42nd in Family and Community Context:** While indicators in this domain show improvements, in 2017-2021, 12% of children lived in a high-poverty area – an adverse community environmental factor that impacts a child’s ability to thrive.

“As we look ahead to a contentious gubernatorial race this fall and a state budget year for the General Assembly, now is the time to look more deeply at the needs of the child care sector and what it will cost the Commonwealth – what it will cost our kids – if there’s no action. The *Data Book* shows concerning trends in education, health, and family economics as we enter a post-pandemic world. Our elected officials must use this as a place of common ground and as a springboard for action in 2024,” urged Brooks.

Transitioning from a faltering child care system to creating a flourishing one will take new thinking and investing at the local, state, and national levels. During the pandemic, Congress infused millions of dollars into the child care sector to stabilize it for families and businesses. In April, President Biden issued an executive order aimed at expanding access, lowering costs, and raising wages. It could prove to be a helpful framework, but more is needed at the federal and state level:

- Kentucky should invest in child care in the same way investments are made in other core infrastructure, such as roads and emergency response systems. With the support of American Rescue Plan funds, Kentucky has been able to expand accessibility of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), education programs for early educators, and family child care homes, as well as implement the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership program. As these federal funds run out, the General Assembly can allocate more funds to boost the accessibility of child care services and the capacity of the child care workforce.

- Public and private leaders should work together to improve the infrastructure for family child care homes, which is a critical resource for parents working non-traditional hours. Kentucky can begin by lowering the barriers to entry for potential providers by increasing access to start-up and expansion capital.
- Congress should reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act and increase funding for public pre-kindergarten and Head Start.
- To help young parents, Congress should expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

###

RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2023 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 datacenter.aecf.org.

ABOUT KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES

Kentucky Youth Advocates believes all children deserve to be safe, healthy, and secure. As THE independent voice for Kentucky's children, we work to ensure policymakers create investments and policies that are good for children. Learn more at www.kyyouth.org.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young people 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.