

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

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## **Louisiana Ranks 49th in Child Well-Being and Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care Pushes Parents to the Breaking Point**

*50-State Data Show Economy Loses \$122 Billion a Year as Child Care Challenges Cause Parents to Miss, Quit or Scale Back Work, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds*

**NEW ORLEANS** — Louisiana was ranked 50th in children's economic well-being and 49th in children's health, 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. Additionally, the report highlights the reality that our country's lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes Louisiana parents to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care are paying dearly for it. These child care challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie women professionally.

"Expanding access to child care is a uniquely win-win-win policy," said Jennifer Roberts, CEO of Agenda for Children, Louisiana's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "High-quality child care offers lifelong benefits to children, enables parents to work and improve their children's economic security, and strengthens our economy through increased workforce participation. Making child care affordable and accessible for all families will have huge rewards for all Louisianans."

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. In addition, *Data Book* finds that in 2020—21, 8% of Louisiana children birth to age five 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 homes, they often can't pay for it. Louisiana's average annual cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$7,306, 7% of median income for a married couple and 30% of a single mother's income in the state. With 45% of Louisiana children living in single-parent families, child care costs put quality care out of reach for far too many children. Louisiana made some progress in recent years as it used one-time federal funding to connect 16,000 more children to child care. However, when that funding ends this year, thousands of Louisiana children and families will find themselves without affordable child care.

"Too many families struggle to find affordable, quality child care, often preventing them from paying rent and buying life's necessities, such as food, diapers and clothes," said Courtney Rogers, Director of Agenda for Children's Judy Watts Center for Policy and Advocacy. "Without significant investments from both the state and federal governments, parents will be forced to make impossible choices, such as choosing lower-quality care because they don't have funds to pay for quality care or even leaving the workforce altogether because they find it cheaper to stay home than pursue a career. Louisiana's children and families are counting on our leaders to invest where it matters most and do all that they can to improve the state's child care system."

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are paid worse than 98% of professions. Median national pay for child care workers was \$28,520 per year or \$13.71 an hour in 2022. Wages for child care workers in Louisiana are even lower, with a median wage of just \$20,850 per year or \$10.02 per hour. These wages are not only below what is considered a living wage, they'd put a single parent of two below the official poverty line. Inadequate compensation is a major contributor to extraordinarily high turnover in the child care sector. University of Virginia researchers have estimated that Louisiana's child care centers have a 46% annual turnover rate, which has enormous consequences for program quality and children's relationships with their teachers.

The failings of the child care market also affect the current and future health of the American economy, costing \$122 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.

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. This year’s data show concerning increases in Louisiana’s rate of low birthweight babies, as well as a 44% increase in the child and teen death rate between 2019 and 2021. In positive news, Louisiana was one of just three states where fourth grade reading proficiency improved between 2019 and 2022.

“As states and communities work to strengthen our child care system, we need to focus not only on expanding access to affordable child care, but also on adequately compensating early childhood educators,” said Teresa Falgoust, Director of Data and Research at Agenda for Children. “Recent surveys showed that half of child care teachers in New Orleans are food insecure, and nearly three-quarters of those with young children cannot afford child care themselves. It’s time that child care teachers’ wages reflect the true value of the work they do every day.”

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. An executive order issued by President Biden in April is aimed at expanding access, lowering costs, and raising wages. It could prove to be a helpful framework, but more is needed:

- Federal, state, and local governments should invest more in child care. Louisiana’s state and local governments need to increase investments to make child care affordable for more families and adequately compensate child care teachers for their valuable work.
- Public and private leaders should work together to improve the infrastructure for home-based child care, beginning by lowering the barriers to entry for potential providers by increasing access to start-up and expansion capital.
- To help young parents, Congress should expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The 2023 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://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](http://datacenter.aecf.org).

#### **ABOUT AGENDA FOR CHILDREN**

Agenda for Children, a private nonprofit organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. Visit [www.agendaforchildren.org](http://www.agendaforchildren.org) to learn more.

#### **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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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