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Contact: Helen Hemminger hhemminger@mekids.org PHONE # 207-543-4064

Maine Ranks 12th in Child Well-Being
but Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care Pushes Parents to the Breaking Point

*Child Care Challenges Cause Parents to Miss, Quit or Scale Back Work, the
Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds*

AUGUSTA, MAINE — Maine ranks 12th in overall child well-being, according to the **2023 KIDS COUNT® National Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring. However, our country's lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes parents in Maine 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 per year and stymie women professionally.

"Access to affordable, high-quality child care is critical to support working parents and the healthy development of their children," said Stephanie Eglinton, Executive Director of the Maine Children's Alliance, Maine's member of the KIDS COUNT® network. "We must do more on the state and national levels to advance policies and investments that reflect the essential role of child care in the well-being of Maine children and families."

The *Data Book* provides data showing that too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules. And women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving. The *Data Book* reports that in 2020—2021 in Maine, 15% of children birth to age 5 lived in families in which someone had to quit, change, or refuse a job because of problems with child care—the ninth highest rate in the country.

Even if parents can find an opening at child care near their home, they often can't pay for it. Maine's average annual cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$10,923, or 10% of a couple's median income and 32% of a single mother's median income.

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. Maine's child care workers earned slightly more than the national median rate at \$30,870 or \$14.84. Nationally, in 2022, child care workers earn less than the median wage for retail (\$14.26) and customer service (\$18.16).

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 sixteen 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. Maine fared well in measures related to family and

community. For example, Maine ranked first in the country in having the lowest percentage of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma, (4 percent compared to the national rate of 11 percent.) On the other hand, Maine's overall rank in education measures was 34th , compared to the high rankings of the neighboring states of Vermont (11th), New Hampshire (fourth) and Massachusetts (first). Maine was 25th in the rate of participation in nursery school or preschool, 40th in fourth graders' reading proficiently, 28th in eighth graders' math proficiency, and 24th in high school graduation rates.

A good child care system is essential for Maine students to succeed academically and for our economy to prosper. 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. State and local governments should maximize remaining pandemic recovery act dollars to fund needed child care services and capacity. Congress should reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act and increase funding for public pre-kindergarten and Head Start.
- Public and private leaders in Maine should work together to support the collection of data to better determine child care supply and demand. This information can be used to target expansion in needed areas such as providing incentives to support expansion of family child care in rural communities or utilizing state contracts to encourage provider growth in high-demand areas of the state. The First for ME model, an Early Head Start child care partnership model, should be expanded in additional Maine communities to support and expand family child care.
- 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. 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 THE MAINE CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

MCA advocates for sound public policies and best practices that improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families. For more information, visit <https://www.mekids.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.

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