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Ohio Ranks 29th in Child Well-Being and Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care is Pushing Parents to the Breaking Point

Child care crisis costs Ohio an estimated \$3.9 billion annually

Columbus, Ohio — When it comes to ensuring that all children have what they need to thrive, Ohio falls short. Ohio ranks 38th in the nation, with 276,000 children living in high poverty areas 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. One of the contributing factors is our state's lack of affordable and accessible child care, which short-changes children and causes parents in Ohio 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 Ohio's economy billions of dollars a year and hold parents back professionally.

The report shows other concerning indicators of child well-being. Ohio ranks 30th nationally for students who do not graduate from high school, trailing neighboring West Virginia (first) and Kentucky (third), with less than 10% of students in both states not graduating compared to 16% in Ohio. Ohio can do more for children starting in early childhood to help them succeed in high school and be ready for the workforce by making comprehensive strategic policy changes and investments.

"Ohio has a long way to go when it comes to ensuring the well-being of its children. The state's rank of 29th in child well-being is a call to action," said Kelly Vyzral, Senior Health Policy Associate of Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, Ohio's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "We must do more to invest in our children and families by investing in early childhood education, providing quality affordable healthcare, and creating safe and supportive communities."

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. The *Data Book* reports that in 2020—21, 13% percent of Ohio children under age 6 lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. In Indiana, only 9% of parents had to do the same. 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. Ohio's average cost of center-based child care for a toddler in was \$11,302, 11% of the median income of a married couple and 40% 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. Median national pay for child care workers was \$28,520 per year or \$13.71 an hour in 2022, less than the 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 the American economy, costing \$122 billion a year in lost earnings, productivity and tax revenue, according to one study. According to a ReadyNation study, Ohio loses \$3.9 billion a year. 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.

“I am disappointed to see Ohio in the bottom half of the nation regarding some of the most important areas for our children. We have a lot of work to do, but I do believe there is hope for the future,” said **State Rep. Jessica Miranda (D-Forest Park)**. “If we want Ohio to grow and be an economic leader, we need to put people first with a strong child care system that supports our work force and our families. Additionally, we need to invest in affordable housing and healthcare to support the needs of our people, to ensure all Ohioans—no matter your race, gender or economic status—have the freedom to be who they are, the dignity of a safe community and secure job, and the opportunity to thrive.”

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:

- **Increased public funding for compensation for early care and education teachers and staff** that supports a living wage and offers benefits. Adequate and consistent state and federal funding is critical to increasing compensation for the early childhood field while also increasing affordability for families.
- **Expanded eligibility for child care.** Currently, Ohio has one of the lowest eligibility levels in the nation, capping eligibility for child care subsidies at 142% of the federal poverty level, or approximately \$38,000 for a family of four. With the average private-pay cost of child care at \$8,796 per child in Ohio, expanding child care subsidies to more families is a crucial part of increasing access to high-quality early learning for all Ohio’s children.
- **Expanded state and federal funding.** Increased funding is needed to support the costs of maintaining a high-quality early learning program, including compensation for staff, professional development, curriculum and supplies, maintaining high-quality facilities, and other ongoing operational expenses. Most high-quality early learning providers are currently forced to operate on razor-thin margins, creating a system that is extremely vulnerable to instability.

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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 Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. [Visit our website](#).

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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