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Utah Shines in Child Well-Being Rankings, Yet the Strain of Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care Pushes Parents to the Breaking Point

13% of Utah children birth to 5 live in families that had employment opportunities affected by the child care crisis from Annie E. Casey Foundation findings.

Salt Lake City, Utah — Utah made significant strides in overall child well-being, moving up to second place in the country from fourth last year, according to the *2023 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that analyzes how children and families are faring. However, our country's lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes parents in Utah 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.

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. In addition, the *Data Book* reports that in 2020—21, 13% of Utah 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 home, they often can't pay for it. Utah's average cost of center-based child care for toddlers was \$9,003 per year, 9% of the median income of a married couple and 24% of a single mother's income in the state. Utah's neighbor to the north, Idaho, saw a similar cost at \$7,675, 9% of a married couple's median income, for center-based child care for a toddler.

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. 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* ranks the states according to how children are faring, presenting national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being,

Utah ranked 2nd, education 6th, health 18th, and family and community factors 1st. Utah's overall rank of second in the country reflects many ways Utah's decision-makers have bolstered policies that support child well-being.

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“Despite being the youngest state in the nation, with one of the highest rates of new births per capita, Utah invests very little in the development and education of young children,” said Jenna Williams, “The State of Utah spends 1% of state funds on early childhood education for children under the age of six. Any budget is a moral statement of priorities. Utah must make a commitment to early learning to solve the child care crisis and strengthen the workforce.”

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. Thanks to pandemic recovery act dollars, Utah now has more licensed child care slots available to families than before the pandemic began in 2020. To ensure this progress is not lost, Utah should continue the COVID-era programs that helped the child care industry thrive, like stabilization grants, workforce bonuses, co-pay waivers, and regional Care about Child Care grants.
- 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. 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 VOICES FOR UTAH CHILDREN

Voices for Utah Children advocates and advances policies and practices that are good for all of Utah’s children. At Voices for Utah Children, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. And to achieve this vision, we ensure all kids are ready to learn, and they and their families are healthy and economically secure. For more information, visit www.utahchildren.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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