

Voices
for Vermont's Children



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Vermont Ranks Fourth in Child Well-Being but Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care Pushes Parents to the Breaking Point

Data Show Child Care Challenges Cause Vermont Parents to Miss, Quit or Scale Back Work, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

MONTPELIER, VT —Vermont ranks fourth 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. Despite the fourth place ranking, the report also shows that our country's lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes parents in Vermont to change 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.

According to the report, 16% of children birth to age 5 in Vermont lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. This is the highest rate in any state, tied with Arizona and North Carolina. And women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

The Data Book framework helps us recognize how families' choices are constrained by systems that do not consistently operate in the best interests of kids and families, said Sarah Teel, Research Director for Voices for Vermont's children. "Families balance multiple demands and resource needs with insufficient public support. The urgently-needed action taken by the legislature this year to address childcare prompts important considerations about how to address the other systemic barriers so that children and families in our state can thrive, without falling into a scarcity narrative."

Years of focused advocacy in Vermont has led to widespread understanding and acknowledgement of this problem. This year, the Vermont Legislature passed a historic child care bill aimed at transforming the system of early care to improve access, quality, and affordability through an annual investment of over \$120 million. The bill is particularly timely in the degree to which it speaks directly to the very issues pointed to by the data book. The report highlights both the high cost of care for families and the low wages of professionals in the field, both of which are at unsustainable levels, and Vermont's bill includes provisions to address both.

"The system is incredibly complex, and for families and young children, the impact and value of access to quality, inclusive environments that meet children's individual needs can't be overstated. It's about so much more than employment; it is about giving families choices that support healthy development and a sense of belonging," said Teel.

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 — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. New Hampshire, Utah, and Massachusetts rank first, second, and third in overall well-being in the *2023 Data Book*; Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico are ranked 48th, 49th, and 50th.

Across the four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community — Vermont ranks relatively well in comparison to many other states.

Vermont ranked eighth in the economic well-being domain, but there is significant room for improvement in the areas of housing cost and employment. Twenty-four percent of children lived in households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs in 2021, ranking 16th best among states. Twenty-four percent also lived in households where no parent had full-time, year-round employment, ranking 11th best among states.

In education, Vermont's rate of high school students not graduating within 4 years (17%) was higher than in previous years. In health, Vermont maintained a relatively low rate of births to low-birth weight babies and a high rate of health insurance coverage for children. Vermont ranked fourth in the family and community domain, which tracks neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, births to parents under 19, single (in this data, meaning unmarried) parents, and parental education beyond high school as factors.

The inclusion of additional data on the cost and accessibility of child care adds to the comprehensive view of family well-being that the annual *Data Book* provides. The failings of the child care market also affect the current and future health of Vermont's economy, costing the state [\\$195 million 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.

Even if parents can find an opening at child care near their home, they often can't pay for it. Vermont's average cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$12,959, 12% of median income for a married couple and 37% of a single mother's income in the state. The cost of home-based care for a toddler, estimated at 28% of a single mother's median income, was similarly prohibitive.

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. In Vermont, the hourly median wage for childcare workers was \$15.43 in 2022.

The Casey Foundation report recommends increased investments and focus on childcare at the federal, state and local levels. In the context of Vermont's historic efforts to do exactly this, Voices also recommends that Vermont policymakers build on this important progress by advancing an equitable and comprehensive economic safety net with sufficient cash resources to provide families with the flexibility and resiliency they need to navigate a complex economic reality.

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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 Vermont's Children

Voices for Vermont's Children is a research-based, multi-issue advocacy organization focused on promoting public policies that center a systemic response to meeting the needs of children and youth. We apply research, analysis and the lived experience of Vermont's children and families to the pursuit of equity for all kids. To learn more, visit www.voicesforvorkids.org.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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