



# West Virginia KIDS COUNT

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## **West Virginia Ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in Child Well-Being but Inaccessible, Unaffordable Childcare Will Continue to Push More Families into Poverty**

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

**Charleston, West Virginia** — West Virginia ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> 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. This year's report focuses on the rising cost of childcare. The state's lack of affordable and accessible childcare short-changes children and causes parents in West Virginia to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care are paying dearly for it. These childcare challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie women professionally.

During the 2023 legislative session, childcare providers pushed for enrollment-based subsidies. Kristy Ritz, the West Virginia Association for Young Children executive director and member of the KIDS COUNT network, said that by basing reimbursements on enrollment instead of attendance, the bill would have created more financial stability for providers. That, in turn, would allow providers to increase their childcare slots, helping parents avoid years-long waitlists. If more West Virginia parents can get their kids in care, more parents can work, according to Ritz.

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure childcare that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. The *Data Book* reports that in 2020–21, 13% of West Virginia children birth to age 5 lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with childcare. 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 a childcare center near their home, they often can't pay for it. West Virginia's average cost of center-based childcare for a toddler was \$7,955, 9% of the median income of a married couple and 35% of a single mother's income. While the cost of care burdens families, childcare workers are paid worse than 98% of professions. Median national pay for childcare 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 stakes are high. Last year, West Virginia KIDS COUNT reported that 21% of West Virginia's children are living in households with a high housing cost burden. Now due to the childcare crisis, that number could certainly rise. 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.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the failings of the childcare market also affect the 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. Their report also found:

- While 10% of white children lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of childcare, this figure was 17% of Black children and 16% of Latino children .
- More than 60% of childcare workers reported having difficulty paying their own food and utility bills in the most recent month.
- Infant childcare is so expensive that one analysis indicates it costs more than in-state college tuition in 34 states and the District of Columbia.
- The main federal mechanism for subsidizing care, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, partially offsets costs for only 1.3 million of the more than 12 million kids in childcare. Of children eligible for subsidies under federal rules, only one in six receives them.

Transitioning from a faltering childcare 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 childcare. State and local governments should maximize remaining pandemic recovery act dollars to fund needed childcare services and capacity. Congress should reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, while the West Virginia legislature should pass a bill to base childcare reimbursements on enrollment, rather than attendance.
- 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 WEST VIRGINIA KIDS COUNT**

We are now in our 34<sup>th</sup> year of championing our vision to make West Virginia a great place to be a kid! Our mission serves us well: Providing the most trusted data about the well-being of West Virginia's children and building alliances to advocate for what our kids need. So many incredible West Virginians believe in and support that mission.

#### **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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