



UNDER EMBARGO Until June 10, 2024 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: Xanna Burg | xburg@montanabudget.org | 678-315-3296

Montana Ranks 20th in Child Well-Being, Indicating Progress Needed to Better Support Children and Families

Montana continues to rank in the middle of the pack for children’s well-being, according to the **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring in post-pandemic America. While Montana made modest improvements in three of the four economic well-being indicators, thousands of children live in families struggling to make ends meet.

In 2022, 31,000 Montana children lived below poverty, or in households with incomes of about \$30,000 for a family of four. Notably, poverty rates are disproportionately higher for Black, Indigenous and other children of color as a result of generations of added barriers and systemic racism that made it harder for families of color to build economic security. Housing remains a large expense for many families, with 1 in 5 children living in a household that spends more than 30 percent of their income on housing. When families spend more of their income on housing, it leaves less income for other necessities like food, child care, and transportation costs.

The **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** also shows Montana falling behind other states in children attending preschool. Montana made recent state investments in early childhood support programs, both by expanding eligibility for the Best Beginnings Scholarship and creating an early literacy program. Continued investment in these two early childhood programs is essential to maintain increased access to early education opportunities.

“Seeing poverty remain high in Montana is concerning,” said Xanna Burg, Director of KIDS COUNT with the Montana Budget & Policy Center. “There are proven policies state leaders can implement to reverse this trend: a state-based child tax credit, expanded eligibility for school meals, continued participation in the Summer EBT program or SUN Bucks, and continued funding for child care and early childhood education.”

Each year, the **KIDS COUNT® Data Book** presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors. Additional highlights from the report findings for Montana include:

- **Economic:** A quarter of children live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment. Secure employment for families means more stability throughout the year.

- **Education:** In 2022, one-third of fourth graders scored at or above proficient in reading. Schools are still seeing the impacts of the pandemic on students, and more recent investments in early literacy have the potential to shift reading proficiency for Montana’s students.
- **Health:** About 7 percent of children lacked health insurance in Montana in 2022. However, the health insurance landscape has since shifted dramatically, with thousands of Montana children losing Medicaid or CHIP coverage beginning in 2023, when the continuous enrollment provision ended.

Montana should continue to invest in children and families to ensure all children have what they need to thrive. **Continued state investment in child care and early education** through expanded eligibility for the Best Beginnings Scholarship and early literacy initiatives supports a family’s economic well-being and access to early learning opportunities. **Passing a state child tax credit**, particularly one that is refundable for low-income families, can help those struggling the most to pay for rising costs of housing, food, child care, and other necessities.

###

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2024 *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 MONTANA KIDS COUNT

Montana KIDS COUNT is a leading resource for data on child and family well-being in the state and is dedicated to providing current, relevant, and reliable data to shape the issues affecting Montana children and families. Montana KIDS COUNT is a project of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization providing in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. More information can be found at www.montanabudget.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.