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Montana Ranks 22nd 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 **2025 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 two of the four economic well-being indicators, thousands of children live in families struggling to make ends meet.

In 2023, 28,000 Montana children – 12 percent – lived below the poverty level, or in families with annual incomes of less than \$31,900 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 systemic barriers that made it harder for families of color to build economic security. One in four children in Montana lives 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 **2025 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** also shows Montana falling behind other states in children attending preschool, ranking 44th with 64 percent of children ages 3 and 4 not in school from 2019-2023. However, the data represents a five-year timeframe when Montana policymakers made key 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 programs is essential to maintaining increased access to early education opportunities.

“Looking at this data after the recent Legislative session in Montana feels hopeful,” said Xanna Burg, Director of KIDS COUNT with the Montana Budget & Policy Center. “A few key policies passed to help support families that really need it, like covering reduced-price meals, expanding access to the early literacy program, and investing in child care. I think the biggest concern, though, is that it won’t be enough for families struggling with low wages and high costs for things like housing, child care, and food. The work is only just beginning.”

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. Additional highlights from the report findings for Montana include:

- **Economic:** A quarter of children live in families that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, an increase from 21 percent the prior year.
- **Education:** In 2024, about 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 2023. However, the health insurance landscape has since shifted dramatically, with thousands fewer Montana children enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP in 2023, when the continuous enrollment provision enacted during the pandemic ended. This data is critical to continue monitoring closely.

Montana should continue to invest in children and families to ensure all children have what they need to thrive. **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. In the interim, **state agencies that administer support programs like Medicaid can ensure these programs are well-advertised and easy to access**. Additionally, it is a critical moment to ensure federal funding is not cut for key programs that support families, like Head Start, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, Medicaid, and many others.

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be 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.