

Media Inquiries

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North Carolina ranks 34th in *2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book* as NC Child urges focus on supporting thriving kids and families

RALEIGH, N.C. — New data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation sheds light on how children in North Carolina are faring compared to other states. North Carolina’s overall ranking of 34th is lower than the previous year’s ranking of 33rd, and the state’s ranking for the individual indicators of education and economic-well-being dropped as well.

The new data comes from 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.

The number of children living in poverty in North Carolina had been steadily decreasing over the last 10 years, but in this year’s *Data Book*, which compiles data from 2023, the number of children living in poverty had increased to 403,000, or 18 percent of kids, from 2022. Additionally, 27 percent of North Carolina children live in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. North Carolina’s rankings on both of these indicators dropped in the *2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

“As the cost of living has gone up, it’s become more difficult to raise a family,” said Erica Palmer Smith, executive director of NC Child, a nonprofit that advocates for policies that improve the lives of North Carolina children and the state’s member of the Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Network.

This year, the *Data Book* also noted an increase in the number of children ages 3 and 4 who are not enrolled in an early learning program to 150,000 between 2019–2023, or 60 percent of children in this age range. The 2024 *Data Book* ranked North Carolina 31st on this indicator, but this year, the state ranks 37th. “Early learning opportunities help our children reach critical developmental milestones,” said Smith. “And we know that the cost and availability of these programs aren’t just impacting our children’s well-being—it’s impacting our state’s economy and parents’ ability to provide for their families.”

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.

In its 36th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* provides reliable statewide numbers to help leaders see where progress is being made, where greater support is needed and which strategies are making a difference. NC Child encourages lawmakers and officials in North Carolina to use this detailed information to unite across party lines and respond with initiatives that invest in young people. By offering a local road map, the *Data Book* equips policymakers, advocates and communities with the information they need to make decisions that help kids and young people thrive.

“This data gives us a good idea of where we need to make meaningful, smart investments that strengthen families across our state and make North Carolina first in children,” said Smith. “We should strive to be the best when it comes to the lives of our children.”

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ABOUT NC CHILD

NC Child is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that advocates for public policies that improve the lives of all North Carolina children. As the state’s only multi-issue child advocacy organization, NC Child’s work addresses policies that affect the whole child, including health and well-being, early childhood education, and family economic security. NC Child is also a leading source of state-level research and data on the issues affecting children and families, and the organization serves as a trusted and reliable source for policymakers and other child advocates across the state. For more information, visit ncchild.org.

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 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.