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North Dakota Ranks in Top 10 States for Child Well-Being, Yet Progress Needed for Education Outcomes

North Dakota continues to rank high 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. Despite the state's overall rank of 6th, though, there is room for improvement in areas like education, economic well-being, and minimizing disparities.

Black and Indigenous children experience poverty rates more than double the overall 9 percent rate for all North Dakota children. These present-day disparities in poverty are a result of generations of added systemic barriers that made it harder for Black, Indigenous and other families of color to build economic security.

Schools are still seeing the impacts of the pandemic on students. In North Dakota, education outcomes are trending in the wrong direction with this most recent round of data. Only 29 percent of fourth grade students were proficient or above in reading in 2024, a slide from 31 percent in 2022 and placing the state 32nd in this category. The ***2025 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*** also shows North Dakota ranking 50th in preschool enrollment, with 72 percent of children ages 3 and 4 not in school from 2019-2023. North Dakota's continued state investments in early childhood through broader support for Child Care Assistance and the Best in Class four-year-old program have significantly changed the early childhood landscape during the timeframe this data represents. Continued investment in these two early childhood programs is one way the state can increase access to early education opportunities.

"Overall, the *Data Book* highlights some hopeful trends where indicators like poverty and the uninsured rate are trending down again," said Xanna Burg, Director of KIDS COUNT with North Dakota KIDS COUNT. "But the most important story isn't told in the rankings. Despite the statewide poverty rate being one of the lowest in the country, poverty for children of color would instead rank North Dakota toward the bottom. An important question then is how are we as a state supporting families that have historically had more barriers to access health care, economic opportunities, and high-quality education?"

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 North Dakota include:

- **Economic:** In 2023, 15 percent of households spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing. While North Dakota ranks best in the nation on this indicator, with the smallest share of

households affected, too many families still spend a large portion of their income on housing, leaving less for other necessities like food, child care, and transportation.
- **Education**: High school graduation rates dropped slightly, with 85 percent of high school students graduating in four years. Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color are less likely to graduate on time because of generations of added barriers and unequal access to high-quality education.
- **Health**: In 2023, only 4 percent of children were estimated to lack health insurance in North Dakota, a significant decrease from the year prior. The health insurance landscape has continued to shift dramatically throughout 2023 and into today. It is promising to see improvement in health insurance coverage. However, continued outreach to ensure children eligible for Medicaid are enrolled is critical.

North Dakota 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 NORTH DAKOTA KIDS COUNT
North Dakota 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 North Dakota children and families. More information can be found at ndkidscount.org. North Dakota 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. The Montana Budget & Policy Center also leads the KIDS COUNT work in Montana and South Dakota. 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.