



**UNDER EMBARGO Until June 8, 2026 at 12:01 a.m. ET**

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## **Maryland Ranks 19<sup>th</sup> for Child Well-Being in 2026 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* as Maryland Center on Economic Policy Urges Continued Focus on Supporting Thriving Kids and Families**

*New Scoring Index Increases Accountability By Showing How Maryland's Policies Affect Children's Daily Lives; State Score of 616 is Above National Average*

**BALTIMORE** — Despite improvement on other measures of well-being, children in Maryland still struggled to meet key education metrics in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the **2026 *KIDS COUNT Data Book***, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring nationwide. Maryland ranks 19<sup>th</sup> overall for child well-being, slightly ahead of the national average. The data show Maryland leaders must work to preserve recent progress in health and economic security while also continuing to provide enough resources to public schools to address the challenges educators are experiencing nationwide.

For the first time this year, states receive a comprehensive score (from 0 to 1,000) in the *Data Book*, not just a ranking. The scores track 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors — over a five-year period from 2019 to 2024. The new scoring system shows whether policies and public investment are actually improving children's lives, not merely how states compare to each other. Maryland received a score of 616, above the national score of 547, with its lowest score in education and highest in economic well-being.

The *Data Book* also reflects trends between 2019 and 2024. The overall score for Maryland rose from 609 to 616 during this time, with improvements in three of the four domains:

- Economic Well-Being improved by 61 points, to 685
- Education plunged 116 points, to 438
- Health progressed slightly, rising 37 points, to 659
- Family and Community advanced 49 points, to 684

“Maryland enacted a broad range of policies during this period that are clearly helping kids and their families, such as raising the minimum wage, increasing access to health care, and expanding the availability of family income supports like tax credits,” said Nonso Umunna, *KIDS COUNT* Director of the Maryland Center on Economic Policy (MDCEP), Maryland's member of the Casey Foundation's *KIDS COUNT* network. “However, recent federal policy changes require continued state action to protect the economic well-being of working families.”

Additional Maryland trends in the *Data Book* include:

- **More than 1 in 10 children are living in poverty:** The percentage of children living in poverty has remained steady in the last few years. After declining from a high of 14% in 2021, it has remained at 11% in 2023 and 2024. The federal poverty level was \$25,820 for a family of three in 2024.
- **Housing costs remain the biggest financial challenge for families:** The share of children living in households burdened by high housing costs rose from 29% in 2023 to 30% in 2024, for a total of 414,000 kids, representing a percentage increase for the first time since downward trend began in 2014.

- **The share of uninsured children is rising:** In 2019, 97% of children had health insurance. Since then, the percentage of children with health insurance has declined. In 2024, 67,000 children did not have health insurance, compared to 48,000 in 2019
- **Education scores have not rebounded from the pandemic,** with proficiency levels remaining lower than 2019, especially in math.
- **Fewer children live in high-poverty neighborhoods:** A small decline in the share of kids residing in high-poverty neighborhoods, to 3 percent, represents about 5,000 fewer children in these communities in 2020–24 compared to 2015–19.
- **Teen birth rate continues decades-long decline:** After stagnating at 11 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 for three years, the teen birth again continued to decline to 10 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19, and is down nearly 80% since 1991.

In its 37th 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. MDCEP encourages lawmakers and officials in Maryland 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.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The 2026 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook). 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 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.

#### **ABOUT THE MARYLAND CENTER ON ECONOMIC POLICY**

The Maryland Center on Economic Policy advances innovative policy ideas to foster broad prosperity and help our state be the standard-bearer for responsible public policy. We engage in research, analysis, strategic communications, public education, and grassroots alliances promoting robust debate and greater public awareness of the policy choices Maryland residents face together. [mdeconomy.org](http://mdeconomy.org)