



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

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**West Virginia Ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in 2026 *KIDS COUNT* Data Book as WVCBP Urges Focus on Supporting Thriving Kids and Families; State Score of 443 is Below National Average**

**Subhead: *Data Book* introduces new scoring index to increase accountability by showing how WV’s policies and public investment impact children’s daily lives**

**Charleston, WV** —West Virginia ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in child well-being 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.

The report finds that between 2019 and 2024, West Virginia saw reductions in the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas, from 11 percent in 2019 to 8 percent in 2024, and in the rate of teen births, from 25 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2019 to 18 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2024. Over the same period, the number of children living in high cost-burdened households slightly worsened, from 20 percent in 2019 to 21 percent in 2024, as did the number of babies born with low birthweights, from 9.8 percent in 2019 to 10.0 percent in 2024. Overall, West Virginia saw improvements in the family and community and economic indicators, while health indicators slightly worsened. Education metrics, while down, are continuing to improve after a pandemic-era decline.

Between 2019 and 2024, child well-being in the US declined, driven by factors such as a crisis in educational outcomes and an increase in child deaths. The data show that West Virginia leaders must take action to better support child health and public education and help the state maintain health insurance coverage gains now at risk due to the implementation of HR 1 (One Big Beautiful Bill).

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. West Virginia received a score of 443, below the national score of 547, with lowest scores in the education and health domains. However, while children’s overall well-being declined in 29 states since 2019, West Virginia is one of 15 states that saw overall well-being improve. Positive national trends mirror those in West Virginia and include declines in the percentage of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods and in the teen birth rate. One positive finding from the report is that the percentage of West Virginia children without health insurance declined from 4 percent in 2019 to 3 percent in 2024, but these gains were experienced in part due to pandemic-era enhancements and are now threatened by troubling new health policies included in HR 1.

In addition to ranking 41<sup>st</sup> overall, within the four domains West Virginia ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in family and community context, 37<sup>th</sup> in economic well-being, 43<sup>rd</sup> in education, and 45<sup>th</sup> in health according to the *2026 Data Book*.

This year’s report shows important progress in the economic well-being of children in the Mountain State since 2019, but also that much work remains to be done to meaningfully invest in our children’s educational and health outcomes. In alignment with national trends, the percentage of West Virginia children ages 3 and 4 who are not attending school increased from 65 percent in 2019 to 68 percent in

2024, the percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> graders below proficient in reading increased from 70 percent in 2019 to 75 percent in 2024, and the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders below proficient in math increased from 76 percent in 2019 to 82 percent in 2024. Regarding the health domain, the percentage of low-birthweight babies increased from 9.8 percent in 2019 to 10.0 percent in 2024 and the rate of child and teen deaths in West Virginia increased from 31 per 100,000 children in 2019 to 33 per 100,000 children in 2024.

“While West Virginia saw some meaningful improvements in family and community and economic indicators, much more must be done to ensure all our state’s children can thrive in all domains. Backsliding in health and educational outcomes can be overcome through meaningful attention and investment in evidence-based programs that serve all children, including early childhood education, our public schools, and Medicaid and CHIP,” said Sean O’Leary, senior policy analyst of the WVCBP, West Virginia’s member of the Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT network.

In its 37<sup>th</sup> 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. 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.

“We encourage lawmakers and officials in West Virginia to use this information to unite across party lines and respond with initiatives that invest in young people. We know what children need to grow up healthy and connected so they can succeed as adults: stable homes, strong schools, nutritious food, meaningful relationships, and opportunities to learn, play, and grow. Programs that meet these needs are smart investments, fostering safe childhoods and long-term gains like employment and economic growth,” said Kelly Allen, the WVCBP’s executive director.

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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). 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 WEST VIRGINIA CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY**

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy is a public policy research organization that is independent, nonprofit, and statewide. The WVCBP works to advance public policies that increase opportunity and eliminate inequities through credible and accessible research and community-rooted advocacy.

#### **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.