OCTOBER 2025

MEASURING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES:

A 10-Year Update

Supplemental Poverty Measure
KIDS COUNT® Data Snapshot

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

Child poverty in the United States swung from historic lows to troubling highs in just three years. In 2021, with federal pandemic relief and an expanded child tax credit in place, the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) showed child poverty at 5% — the lowest rate on record. By 2024, that rate had nearly tripled to 13%, returning to pre-pandemic levels. Without public support, it would have been 25% (see ***Figure 1***).

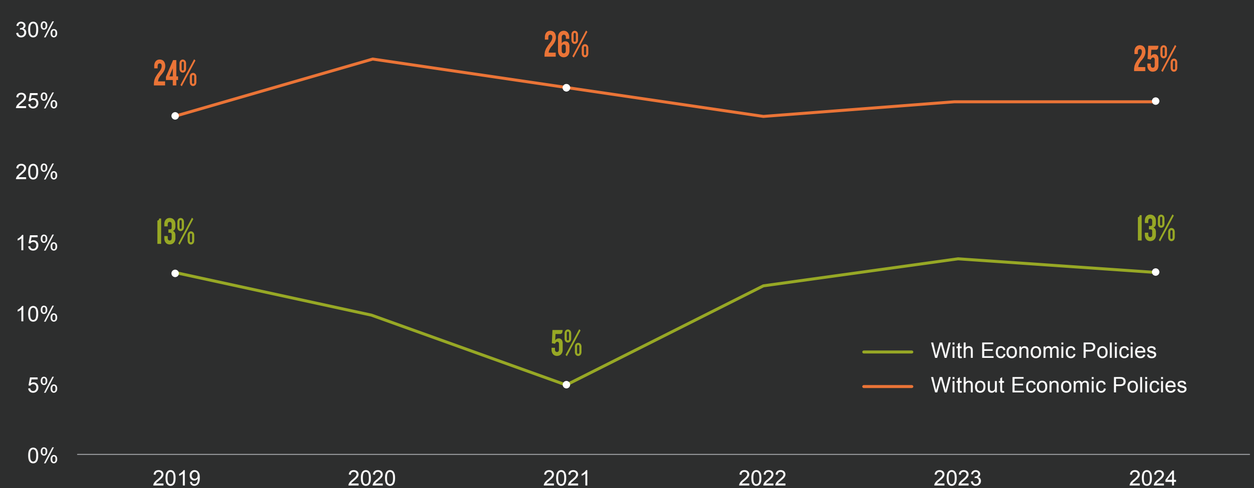
A decade ago, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's first **"Measuring Access to Opportunity"** snapshot revealed that the percentage of children whose families cannot make ends meet — most of whom had at least one parent working full time — would have nearly doubled without government interventions to alleviate financial hardship at the time. Today, that reality remains. In 2024, 61% of children in poverty lived in families with at least one working parent.[1]

Released again in partnership with Casey's KIDS COUNT® Network, this new snapshot delivers the same message with fresh urgency: Public policies to reduce child poverty work, and it is vital that reliable government data remain available to measure the effects of those policies. These programs make a difference in every state — from Maine to Washington — though the effect looks different depending on local economies and policy choices.

FIGURE 1

U.S. Supplemental Child Poverty Rates With and Without Key Government Economic Policies (2019 Through 2024)

The SPM reveals the powerful impact of public investments on strengthening family finances and reducing child poverty in America.



Source: *Population Reference Bureau analysis of U.S Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 to 2025 Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASECs).*
Note: *"Without Economic Policies" removes positive value transfers: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); Child Tax Credit (expanded and fully refundable in 2021 only); Economic Impact Payments (2020 and 2021 only); Social Security; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); National School Lunch; Capped Housing Subsidies; Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); Unemployment Insurance; Child Support received; Cash welfare (TANF); Worker's Compensation; and Emergency Broadband Benefit/Affordable Connectivity Program (EBB) (2022, 2023 and 2024 only).*

WHY MEASURING CHILD POVERTY MATTERS

The swing in child poverty rates shows why tracking poverty is so important. These numbers are not abstract.[2] For children, the consequences are immediate and profound: Hunger, unstable housing, inadequate health care, unsafe neighborhoods and other pressures undermine healthy development, school success and long-term well-being. These experiences can increase the risk of chronic illness, limit employment prospects and create lasting barriers to opportunity.[3]

But poverty doesn't just harm individual children. Researchers estimate child poverty costs the United States up to **$1 trillion annually** in lost productivity, lower lifetime earnings and higher spending on health care, crime and public programs.[4] Schools in high-poverty areas face greater resource constraints and lower academic achievement than wealthier districts.[5] Hospitals in low-income communities absorb more uncompensated care when families lack insurance.[6] And neighborhoods with concentrated poverty often have more crime, weaker civic infrastructure and fewer community resources.[7]

Measuring child poverty gives us a window into children's day-to-day lives and our nation's long-term health. By tracking shifts, we can better understand the consequences of different policy decisions and economic conditions — proving that poverty levels are not simply inevitable.

The Supplemental Poverty Measure is especially powerful because it shows the difference made by key public policies that support children and families with low incomes. In 2021, the expanded child tax credit alone lifted about 3 million kids out of poverty, helping drive the child poverty rate to a historic low of 5%. By 2024, as pandemic aid ended, overall rates climbed back to 13%, and the remaining network of supportive policies — including tax credits, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food assistance and housing subsidies — kept 8.5 million children out of poverty.

HOW IS POVERTY MEASURED?

Each year, the U.S. Census Bureau releases two key measures of poverty: the official poverty measure (OPM) and the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). Both estimate the share of people with incomes below what is needed to meet basic needs, but they differ in important ways — offering complementary insights for those working to reduce poverty.[8]

- **The OPM**, largely unchanged since the 1960s, provides consistent trend data over time. It relies on pretax cash income and thresholds based on outdated food budgets. It also excludes many critical expenses like housing, health care and child care, and does not adjust for regional differences.[9]
- **The SPM**, launched in 2011, better reflects today's realities. It incorporates housing, medical and child care expenses; adjusts for local cost differences; and counts resources such as tax credits and food assistance.[10]

Because of these differences, the SPM often tells a more complete story than the OPM. From 2021 to 2024, for example, the official measure suggested child poverty declined slightly, while the SPM showed a substantial *increase*.[11] Rising costs of essentials such as housing, food, child care and health care — which the OPM does not capture — have made it harder even for working families to make ends meet, and even with assistance.[12]

The SPM is considered more comprehensive because it accounts for a family's major expenses and noncash benefits like public assistance.[13] As a result, the SPM provides an opportunity to see if public programs designed to support families are effective. It has some limitations, however. The sample size is relatively small at the state level, so single-year state SPM estimates can be unreliable. For this reason, this report presents three-year averages for state-level analysis. Ongoing refinements also make long-term comparisons harder, which is why we don't compare directly with the SPM snapshot the Annie E. Casey Foundation released in 2015.

While Casey's *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* uses the official poverty measure for its annual state rankings because the OPM provides consistent year-to-year data, the SPM offers a more complete picture of how families are faring and how policies shape those outcomes. Together, the two measures offer different insights into child poverty and well-being.

THE DIFFERENCE PUBLIC POLICIES MAKE

The SPM makes one thing clear: public programs effectively reduce poverty. Without supportive policies such as tax credits, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Social Security, millions more children would live in poverty.

As shown in ***Figure 2***, individual programs make a clear difference. The child tax credit, earned income tax credit, SNAP, housing subsidies, Social Security and SSI each reduced child poverty by several percentage points in recent years, helping families cover food, housing and other essentials. States that expand or create their own tax credits can achieve additional, substantial reductions in child poverty, demonstrating that federal and state action together have a profound effect on children's well-being.[14]

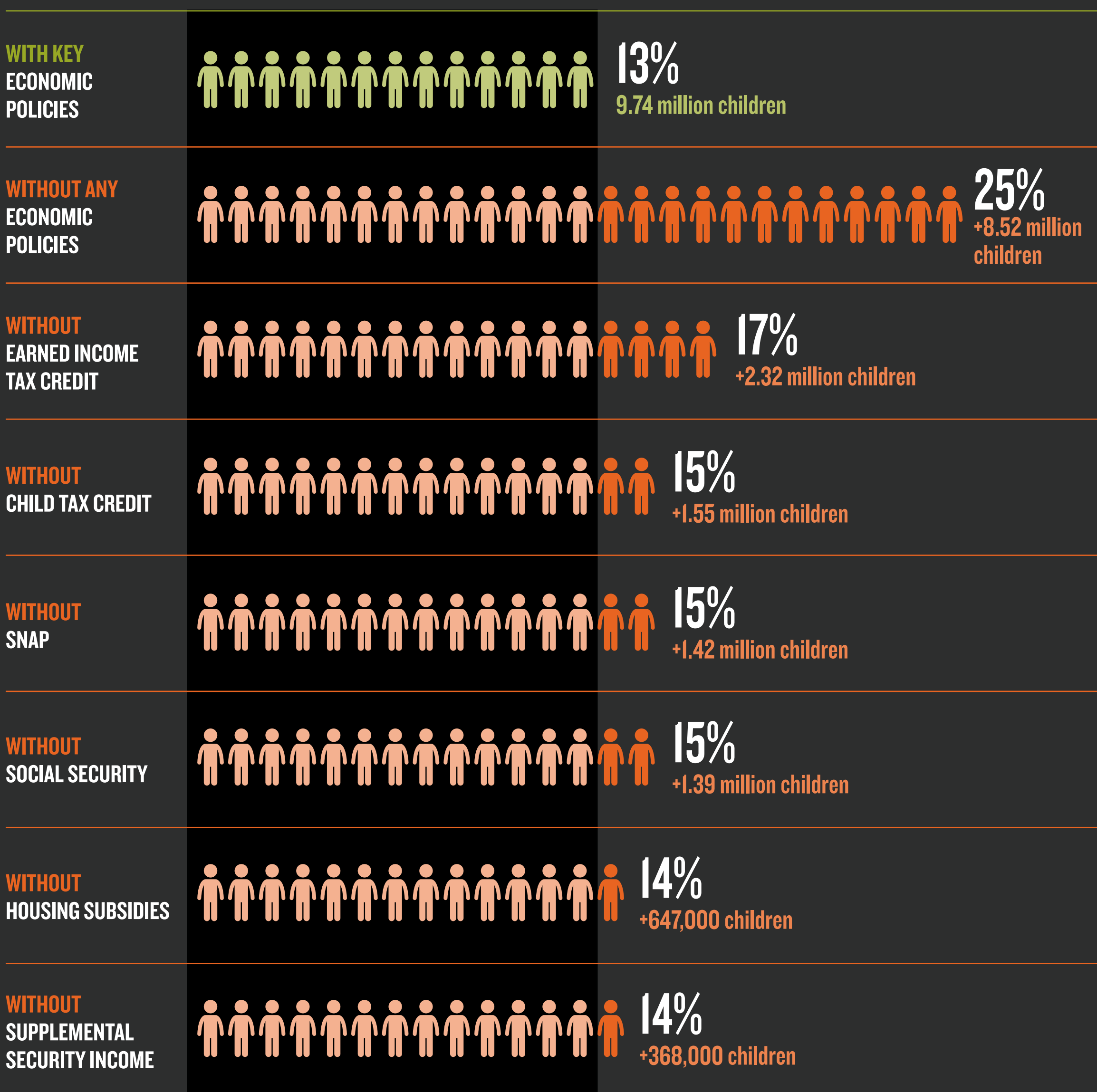
Relief measures during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight this impact more vividly. In 2021, the federal child tax credit alone lifted about 3 million children out of poverty as noted. The child tax credit together with other government supports cut the child poverty rate in half to a historic low of 5%. Without the child tax credit, child poverty would have been almost twice as high (9%).

Yet when policymakers allowed those temporary measures to expire, child poverty climbed again. This sharp rise reflects the rollback of temporary policies and the reality that today's support programs — and wages — are not keeping pace with the rising cost of basic needs, leaving many families working just as hard but falling further behind.

FIGURE 2

Child Poverty Rates With and Without Key Government Economic Policies (2024)

The SPM reveals the powerful impact of these public investments on strengthening family finances and reducing child poverty in America.



Source: *Population Reference Bureau analysis of U.S Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2025 Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASECs).*
Note: *"Without Any Economic Policies" removes positive value transfers: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); Child Tax Credit; Social Security; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); National School Lunch; Capped Housing Subsidies; Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); Unemployment Insurance; Child Support received; Cash welfare (TANF); Worker's Compensation; and Emergency Broadband Benefit/Affordable Connectivity Program (EBB).*

CHILD POVERTY RISES ACROSS ALL GROUPS

Child poverty rates increased for children of every race and ethnicity between 2021 and 2024, with some groups experiencing steeper rises than others:[15]

- White children, from 3% to 7%.
- Asian and Pacific Islander children, from 6% to 10% (though this broad category masks important **subgroup differences**).
- Multiracial children, from 5% to 14%.
- American Indian or Alaska Native children, from 7% to 15%.
- Latino children, from 8% to 21%.
- Black children, from 8% to 23%.

While all groups saw poverty rise, children of color experienced the steepest increases. The SPM makes these disparities visible, highlighting how shifts in policy and economic conditions affect children's well-being differently across communities, depending on a range of factors, including job quality and availability, transportation access and levels of neighborhood investment, among others.[16]

CHILD POVERTY BY STATE, ACCORDING TO THE SPM

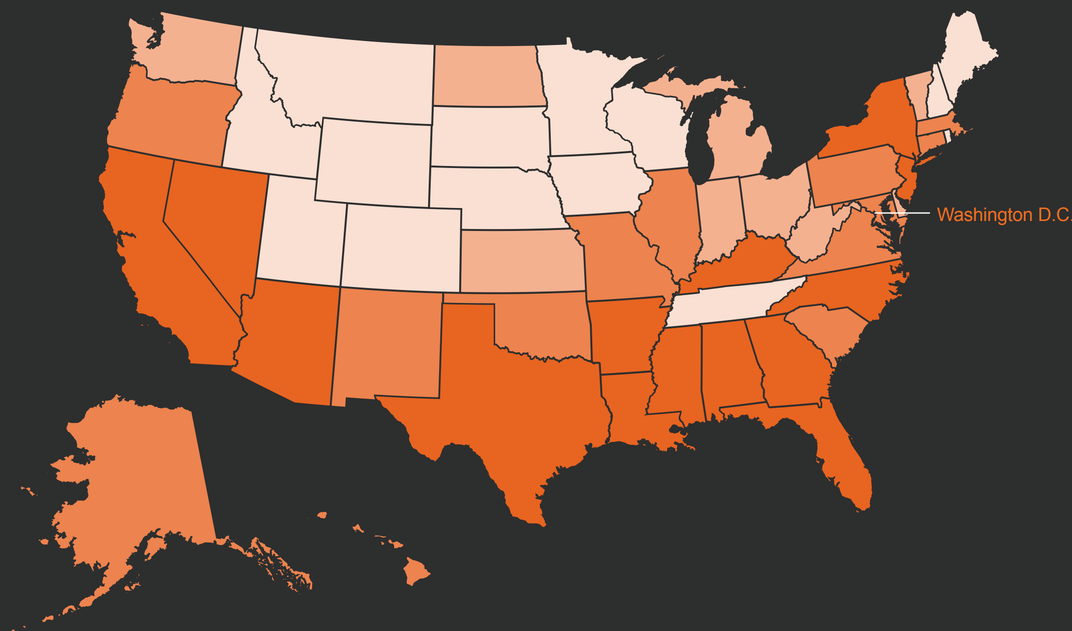
The degree of child poverty shifts markedly across states. As shown in ***Figure 3***, SPM child poverty rates in 2022–2024 ranged from 5% in Maine and 6% in Idaho, Utah and Wyoming to highs of 19% in Louisiana and the District of Columbia and 18% in California and Florida. Most of the states with the lowest rates are in the Mountain West. Separately, three of the five states with the highest rates — California, Florida and Texas — also have the nation's largest child populations.[17] That means millions of children are affected when poverty rates are high in these places.

Change over time also matters. Nearly every state (45 and the District of Columbia) saw increases in child poverty between 2019–2021 and 2022–2024.[18] The steepest jumps occurred in Louisiana (+8 percentage points), New Jersey (+7) and Nevada (+7). By contrast, Colorado, Maine and South Dakota held steady, and Tennessee and Wyoming even saw slight declines.

FIGURE 3

Supplemental Child Poverty Rates by State: 2022–2024

SPM child poverty rates vary widely by state.



5%–8%

Maine *5%*
Idaho *6%*
Utah *6%*
Wyoming *6%*
Iowa *7%*
Minnesota *7%*
Nebraska *7%*
New Hampshire *7%*
South Dakota *7%*
Wisconsin *7%*
Colorado *8%*
Montana *8%*
Rhode Island *8%*
Tennessee *8%*

9%–10%

Indiana *9%*
Kansas *9%*
North Dakota *9%*
Vermont *9%*
Delaware *10%*
Michigan *10%*
Ohio *10%*
Washington *10%*
West Virginia *10%*

11%–13%

Alaska *11%*
Illinois *11%*
Missouri *11%*
New Mexico *11%*
Oklahoma *11%*
Oregon *11%*
Pennsylvania *11%*
Connecticut *12%*
Hawaii *12%*
Maryland *12%*
Massachusetts *12%*
Virginia *12%*
South Carolina *13%*

14%–19%

Arizona *14%*
Arkansas *14%*
Georgia *14%*
New Jersey *14%*
Alabama *15%*
Kentucky *15%*
Nevada *15%*
New York *15%*
North Carolina *15%*
Texas *16%*
Mississippi *17%*
California *18%*
Florida *18%*
District of Columbia *19%*
Louisiana *19%*

Source: *Population Reference Bureau analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2023 to 2025 Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASECs).*

Just as important as the rates themselves is the difference public policies make at the state level. ***Table 1*** shows the effect of supportive programs in each state. Between 2022–2024, federal and state policies together lowered child poverty rates by at least 10 percentage points in 34 states and the District of Columbia. In New Mexico, for example, public policies and programs reduced child poverty by 19 percentage points — the largest impact in the country. In Alaska, Minnesota, Utah and Vermont, the reductions were smaller, around 7 percentage points.

TABLE 1

Effect of Economic Policies on Child Poverty Rates at the State Level: 2022–2024

Location	Percentage With Economic Policies	Percentage Without Economic Policies	Impact of Economic Policies*	
			Percentage	Number
United States	13	25	-12	-8,442,000
Alabama	15	29	-15	-165,000
Alaska	11	18	-7	-13,000
Arizona	14	26	-12	-191,000
Arkansas	14	30	-15	-104,000
California	18	29	-11	-888,000
Colorado	8	16	-8	-98,000
Connecticut	12	22	-10	-73,000
Delaware	10	27	-16	-35,000
District of Columbia	19	30	-11	-14,000
Florida	18	29	-12	-524,000
Georgia	14	26	-12	-291,000
Hawaii	12	28	-16	-48,000
Idaho	6	15	-9	-44,000
Illinois	11	23	-12	-320,000
Indiana	9	21	-11	-181,000
Iowa	7	15	-8	-58,000
Kansas	9	20	-11	-72,000
Kentucky	15	29	-14	-144,000
Louisiana	19	35	-16	-169,000
Maine	5	18	-12	-31,000
Maryland	12	22	-9	-129,000
Massachusetts	12	21	-10	-132,000
Michigan	10	24	-14	-287,000
Minnesota	7	14	-7	-92,000
Mississippi	17	33	-16	-107,000
Missouri	11	24	-13	-180,000
Montana	8	18	-10	-22,000
Nebraska	7	14	-8	-37,000
Nevada	15	25	-10	-68,000
New Hampshire	7	15	-8	-20,000
New Jersey	14	26	-12	-233,000
New Mexico	11	30	-19	-86,000
New York	15	30	-14	-563,000
North Carolina	15	28	-12	-293,000
North Dakota	9	17	-8	-15,000
Ohio	10	19	-9	-237,000
Oklahoma	11	27	-16	-151,000
Oregon	11	21	-10	-84,000
Pennsylvania	11	24	-13	-336,000
Rhode Island	8	17	-9	-19,000
South Carolina	13	25	-13	-143,000
South Dakota	7	15	-8	-17,000
Tennessee	8	18	-10	-153,000
Texas	16	29	-13	-957,000
Utah	6	13	-7	-68,000
Vermont	9	16	-7	-8,000
Virginia	12	20	-8	-148,000
Washington	10	20	-11	-176,000
West Virginia	10	25	-15	-53,000
Wisconsin	7	19	-12	-153,000
Wyoming	6	14	-8	-11,000

* Number and percentage point differences are calculated from unrounded values. Due to rounding, differences may not equal the apparent difference between displayed values.

Source: *Population Reference Bureau analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2023 to 2025 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASECs).*

Note: *"Percentage Without Economic Policies" removes positive value transfers: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); Child Tax Credit; Social Security; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); National School Lunch; Capped Housing Subsidies; Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); Unemployment Insurance; Child Support received; Cash welfare (TANF); Worker's Compensation; and Emergency Broadband Benefit/Affordable Connectivity Program (EBB).Single-year estimates are not reliable at the state level; therefore, three-year averages were calculated. The three-year U.S. average was included for comparison and is different from the one-year estimate included in body of report.*

Regional patterns add another layer to the story. The South has both the highest average child poverty rates and the steepest increase in poverty between 2019–2021 and 2022–2024, rising by 5 percentage points. In contrast, the Midwest reports the lowest average rates and, while poverty rose there as well, the increase was smaller than in other regions. Even in the Northeast — a region that often ranks near the top on child well-being — child poverty with economic policies rose by 4 points, showing that progress is not guaranteed. The West also saw an increase of 4 points. Across states, this story is consistent: Rising costs and expiring pandemic relief aid has intensified economic hardship for families, leaving children facing high poverty rates even when programs are in place.

Taken together, the state-level SPM results show that variation is wide, policies matter everywhere, and children in every state need protection from the effects of poverty — shaped by both state and federal choices. The results also show that public programs are important but not the full answer, and that lifting children out of poverty also requires ensuring access to high-quality jobs for their families and addressing the costs of essentials.

CONCLUSION

The SPM clearly shows that millions of children are kept out of poverty by supportive public policies, and without them, child poverty would nearly double. During an era of sweeping changes in public programs for families, the SPM will be indispensable for understanding how policy decisions affect children's lives.

Poverty is not just a statistic. It reflects whether children have enough to eat, safe housing, health care and the stability they need to thrive. It also reflects the health of our communities and nation: stronger schools, healthier families, safer neighborhoods and a more productive economy. The SPM connects the numbers to these lived realities, showing how children and families experience both economic hardship and relief. But it is not possible without robust data collection.

Only the federal government can gather information comprehensively and consistently across states, giving local schools, public agencies, hospitals and elected leaders the insights they need to strengthen policies for children. Without the SPM, families, communities and policymakers alike would lose one of the clearest tools for understanding how public policy decisions affect kids' daily lives. For decades, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its KIDS COUNT project have helped ensure communities have reliable data on child well-being.

The SPM shows that real progress is possible, and that leaders across the country are making important decisions to help families. But ensuring financial stability is a moving target, especially as the cost of essentials keeps rising. That's why this information matters — it gives decision-makers the tools to respond in real time and adjust policies to meet the urgent needs families are facing today.

ENDNOTES

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Note: Both poverty measures do not include unhoused people or those living in prisons or other institutions (https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/26825/chapter/4#23). The OPM only includes homeless people if they live in shelters (https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R44780).

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