

**UNDER EMBARGO until**  
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## **Opportunities for Improvement for Tennessee in 2016 *KIDS COUNT* Data Book Ranking at 38 in the Nation for Child Well-Being**

*More than One in Four Tennessee Children Lives in Poverty*

Tennessee's ranking on overall child well-being slipped from 36 to 38, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2016 *KIDS COUNT*® Data Book released today. The change was largely driven by worsening economic indicators.

The *KIDS COUNT* Data Book ranks child well-being in states across four domains. Tennessee's overall ranking at 38 was compiled from its rankings of 42 on Economic Well-Being, 36 on Education, 28 on Health and 39 on Family and Community. Each domain is made up of four indicators

"We know the early experiences of children have lifelong effects both on them and on the future prosperity of Tennessee as a whole," said Linda O'Neal, executive director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, the Tennessee *KIDS COUNT*® affiliate. "Good public policies build and maintain a social infrastructure that supports healthy growth and successful outcomes."

"Smart public policies and preventive programs in Tennessee provide an environment that supports healthy development. As a result, adolescents are less likely to abuse alcohol and drugs, the teen birth rate fell 37 percent since 2008, and more youth are graduating high school on time," continued O'Neal.

Despite this progress, Tennessee children continue to struggle financially. The state's worst ranking, 42, was on the Economic Well-Being domain. More than one in four Tennessee children lives in poverty. Approximately one in three children lives in a household that spends more than 30 percent of its income on housing, and/or in a household where no parent has full-time, year-round employment.

While the original research on Adverse Childhood Experiences focused on child maltreatment and family dysfunction, more recent research makes it clear persistent poverty also has a negative long-term impact on children and society. The burden of poverty leaves parents with insufficient time and energy to nurture their children, creates an environment of toxic stress and negatively affects the architecture of the developing brain in young children.

The state's best domain ranking was on Health (28). The good news is fewer children in Tennessee lack health insurance than did in 2008 and the state ranked 17 on this indicator. However, there are still 78,000 children in Tennessee who are not covered, and as other states expand coverage, Tennessee is likely to fall behind on this measure.

"Tennessee needs to find a way to tap into federal Affordable Care Act funds so all Tennessee children have health insurance," said O'Neal.

In 2016 the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation to improve quality in Pre-K. "To improve from a ranking of 40 for children ages 3 and 4 not attending school, the state must expand Pre-K opportunities as quality improves. Quality pre-K provides a safe, stable and nurturing learning environment for young children," added O'Neal.

One of the best long-term strategies to address economic well-being is to improve educational outcomes for Tennessee children and young adults. "Access to post secondary education through Tennessee Promise and Hope Scholarships are important strategies, but Tennessee must do more to improve access to early education and improve reading and math scores," said O'Neal.

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, an independent state agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly, is the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT® partner in the state. The Commission's primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families. KIDS COUNT is an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to disadvantaged children.

*KIDS COUNT National Data Book* is available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Statewide and county-by-county data on Tennessee child well-being indicators are available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. Information on the state's spending on children is at <http://www.tn.gov/tccy/topic/rm-resource-mapping>. For more information, contact (615) 741-2633 or a TCCY regional coordinator.

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