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Connecticut Ranks Seventh Overall in the Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being

With continued success in early education, Connecticut is poised to make further progress on child well-being

HARTFORD, Connecticut — Connecticut remains one of the leading states in the nation for children’s education, ranking third in education with the highest rate of 3- and 4-year olds attending school, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This strong ranking demonstrates the success of the state’s continued investment in early care and education.

However, while prior years showed upward movement in nearly all aspects of child well-being, Connecticut witnessed slight declines in several measures included in the *Data Book*, indicating that significant work remains to support healthy and economically secure families and children. Connecticut is one of the worst states for housing affordability, with 34 percent of children living in families paying more than one third of their incomes on housing. While still in the top five states, the percent of 16-to19-year olds who are disconnected from education and employment has not improved in Connecticut since 2012.

Connecticut has upheld its commitment to children’s health and education, ranking third and 11th in the nation in these domains, respectively. By maintaining funding for health insurance for low-income children along with critical childcare subsidies and the Office of Early Childhood, the state is paving the way for continued growth in these already high-ranking indicators of child well-being. Preserving the Care4Kids program, the state’s primary child care subsidy for low-to-moderate-income working families, will allow the state to make continued progress in expanding access to high-quality early childhood education for all.

At sixth and 16th in the nation, respectively, the rankings for child poverty and parents lacking secure employment highlight the need for marked investments in improved employment opportunities, and a revitalization of the safety net that lifts up underserved communities.

“Connecticut’s strong support of early childcare and education demonstrates that the state is still a great place to raise kids,” said Jim Horan CEO of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS), the Connecticut KIDS COUNT organization. “While budgetary challenges and the progressive decline in funding for programs and agencies that serve families and children have clearly eroded the economic stability and health of our young people, we still have time to reverse that narrative.”

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — that represent what children need most to thrive. For Connecticut, the 2018 rankings indicate that:

- **Investment in working families is needed to sustain the well-being of children.**

The economic security of children remains the area most in need of improvement in Connecticut, as the state ranks 18th in the nation in economic well-being. The child poverty rate fell for the first time since 2011, from 15 to 13 percent, welcome news after years of stagnant or increasing child poverty rates. The percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round work saw a slight decrease from 28 percent to 26 percent. Still, housing costs remain high, with 34 percent of children living in families facing high housing cost burdens, making Connecticut one of the worst states for housing costs, ranking 44th overall. While this represents significant progress since 2010, Connecticut policymakers must consider rapid steps to address housing affordability and wage growth.

- **Early care and education drives Connecticut's strong commitment to learning.** Connecticut ranks third overall in education. Although Connecticut ranks third for fourth-graders reading at grade level, the percent of fourth-graders scoring at or above proficient in reading has been stagnant since 2009, indicating the need for renewed attention and investment in education, particularly in the state's struggling schools. With 64 percent of Connecticut eighth-graders scoring below proficient in math, and 13 percent of high school students still not graduating on time, fully funding public schools must be a priority to ensure teens and young adults can reach their fullest potential.
- **Supporting healthy families and communities requires proactive policy change.** Connecticut ranks 11th overall in family and community indicators. The state has made measured progress ensuring that parents are equipped to raise healthy children, ranking ninth for children living in families where the householder has at least a high school diploma, at 8 percent. However, there has been no change to the 9 percent of children living in high-poverty areas. Passing legislation to support working families, including paid family leave, limits on "on-call" shift scheduling, and a meaningful increase in the minimum will give parents the tools they need to support their children.
- **Challenges in health suggest underlying disparities, despite statewide strengths.** Children's health is an area of strength for Connecticut, which ranks seventh in the nation. Of the state's key accomplishments, Connecticut remained a leader nationwide with the second-lowest child and teen death rate overall. Similarly, children's health insurance was particularly strong, with only 3 percent of children lacking insurance in 2016. Still, the persistent percent of low-birthweight births in Connecticut, which barely declined in over five years, indicates that our health systems are not working for everyone. Investments in maternal and infant health, including access to prenatal care, and expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which has been shown to improve birth weights, must not be ignored.

The precipitous decline in the share of the state spending on children and young people over the last 25 years is evidence of the state's failure to fully invest in its future generations. Disaggregated data also reveals deep disparities in the well-being of Connecticut's children of color, which must be addressed in future state budgets.

"Shrinking investments in our economically vulnerable communities have hampered the ability of all children to thrive, and have perpetuated racial and ethnic disparities across nearly all measures of child well-being," said Horan. "As we work toward the policies and programs that can support our children and mitigate these inequities, it is also imperative that our state improve the economic climate to enable business development and workforce growth to generate much-needed opportunity in Connecticut."

Release Information

The 2018 KIDS COUNT® *Data Book* will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About the Connecticut Association for Human Services

The Connecticut Association for Human Services has been at the center of the fight to eliminate poverty in Connecticut for over a hundred years. Every day, we advance policies and deliver programs that help make sure every family and every child has an equal opportunity to thrive and share in our prosperity. For more information, visit www.cahs.org

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solution 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.

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