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Rhode Island Ranks 19th in Nation for Child Well-Being

Report reveals improved child outcomes but warns of potential damage from inaccurate census

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island (June 27, 2018) — The *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, a national and state-by-state report on child well-being, issued today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, finds that Rhode Island ranks 19th in the nation for overall child well-being and last in New England, behind New Hampshire (1), Massachusetts (2), Connecticut (7), Vermont (8) and Maine (16).

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 — which represent what children need most to thrive. The report examines trends over a five-year period, as well as annual changes.

“While we celebrate Rhode Island’s progress, we must also turn our attention to the disparities that continue to persist among Rhode Island children,” said Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Executive Director Elizabeth Burke Bryant.

According to the *Data Book*, Rhode Island ranks:

- **11th in health.** In 2016, Rhode Island’s child and teen death rate was the lowest in the nation (15 deaths per 100,000 children) and 98 percent of children in Rhode Island had health insurance, the second-best percentage in the nation.
- **20th in economic well-being.** With 3 percent of teens not in school and not working, Rhode Island is ranked best in the nation on this indicator. The percentage of Rhode Island children in poverty declined to 17 percent in 2016 — down from a recent high of 22 percent in 2013.
- **28th in education.** Rhode Island ranks 14th in the nation for fourth-grade reading proficiency (39 percent were proficient), and 33rd for eighth-grade math skills (30 percent were proficient).
- **29th in the family and community domain.** The teen birth rate in the state fell significantly between 2010 and 2016, dropping 41 percent. The teen birth rate in the state is 13 births per 1,000 teens. Rhode Island is ranked sixth in the nation on this indicator.

The progress Rhode Island has been able to make for its children could be jeopardized with an inaccurate count of children and families in the upcoming 2020 census. With a third of Rhode Island’s children under age 5 at risk of failing to be counted in the decennial census, federally funded supports that have driven youth success are in jeopardy. This includes access to health insurance (Rite Care/Medicaid), the School Lunch Program, Head Start and more.

“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms and more kids without health care.”

Roughly 300 federal programs use census-derived data to allocate more than \$800 billion a year. However, census outreach efforts face daunting challenges: a lack of leadership, the first-ever digital survey and the potential of suppressed participation because of a citizenship question. The undercount of young children has worsened with every census since 1980. The 2010 survey had the worst undercount since 1950, with nearly 5 percent of children under five — about 1 million kids — not counted.

If missed in the national count, children of color, low-income children, and children in immigrant families stand to suffer the most from reductions in funding to vital programs. This would have serious effects in Rhode Island — 17 percent of all Rhode Island children are low income, and 45 percent of Rhode Island children under age five are children of color.

Investing in an Accurate Count to Yield a Positive Future for Kids

Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and advocacy at the Casey Foundation, said reliable data, particularly census data, are critical to informing decisions that improve the lives of America’s children. “An inaccurate census threatens to undermine essential resources for communities and erode many of the advancements made in recent years for our children — particularly children of color — for years to come,” Speer said.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation offered the following recommendations to achieve a more accurate census:

- **Maximize the Census Bureau’s capacity:** Federal legislators need to fully fund the census outreach effort, and the administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency to provide support for a more accurate census than in 2010.
- **Fund state and local outreach:** State and local governments and community organizations need to invest in educational outreach around the census to ensure that the most vulnerable communities are counted.
- **Expand the pool of trusted messengers:** Broaden the circle of people (from child care providers to members of the clergy) and organizations (from public schools to libraries) who can provide outreach in their communities to reach hard-to-count households and encourage participation among people most likely to be missed.
- **Address the digital divide:** Provide online access for all families to participate in the census, either in local libraries or schools.
- **Address privacy and confidentiality concerns:** Given the growing distrust and fear of online data breaches, it is critical that government officials ensure the protection of respondents’ data.

The Casey Foundation asserts that this will require a concerted effort by the federal executive branch, Congress, state and local officials, advocates, businesses, service providers, community leaders and philanthropy.

Release Information

The *2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. ET 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 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island’s children and youth. It is one of 50 state-level organizations that work in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the social condition of children at the state and local level across the country. Please visit www.rikidscount.org.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s children 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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.