



UNDER EMBARGO Until Monday, June 17 at 12:01 AM EST

Media Contact: Claire Berkowitz | 207.623.1868 x 206 | cberk@mekids.org

Maine Ranks Ninth in Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being

30th KIDS COUNT® Data Book provides comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the U.S.

AUGUSTA, Maine — Maine moved up in the national rankings for child health and well-being, from 16th place last year to ninth this year, according to the 30th edition of the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This marks the first time Maine has ranked in the top 10. No other state moved more than three places in the rankings this year. Despite this, there was wide disparity in performance between indicators; Maine ranked fifth in indicators related to family and community but ranked 23rd in education indicators.

- **eighth in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether older teens are in school or working. This year, Maine improved in every measure. Most notably, Maine experienced the largest reduction in child poverty of any state last year, from 17 percent in 2016 to 13 percent in 2017.
- **23rd in education.** This year, Maine performed virtually the same as last year on every indicator, but Maine's ranking still went down, signifying that other states made improvements where Maine did not. At 57 percent, Maine ranks 33rd for 3- and 4-year-olds not enrolled in early education programs.
- **fifth in family and community.** In this domain, Maine improved slightly in each of the four measures, and Maine's overall ranking improved from sixth to fifth. At 4 percent, Maine continues to lead the nation with the lowest rate of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma.
- **16th in health.** Due to a decrease in the rate of child and teen deaths (ages 1-19) from last year, Maine improved from 20th to eighth in the ranking for that measure. However, Maine's teen suicide rates continue to be above the national average. Maine's rate of child health insurance coverage stayed flat from last year.

"In one year, Maine had the most significant reduction in child poverty in the country, bolstered in part by the minimum wage increase that went into effect in January 2017," said Claire Berkowitz, MCA's executive director. "Growing up in poverty is one of the greatest threats to healthy child development and so it's very good news that our state is moving the needle in the right direction on this important indicator."

All four of the economic indicators showed a real improvement in rankings in a single year. In addition to 10,000 children being lifted out of poverty, children whose parents lacked regular, full-time employment went from 30 percent in 2016 to 26 percent in 2017. Those children living in a household with a high-cost housing burden (where more than 30 percent of the monthly income was spent on rent, mortgage payments, taxes, insurance and related expenses) improved from 27 percent in 2016 to 20 percent in 2017. And for teens not in school and not working (disconnected youth), Maine improved from 6 percent to 5 percent in one year. In Maine and in the U.S., the economy has been improving, but while the rate of young people working or in school has improved in Maine, it has stayed flat nationally at 7 percent.

While Maine experienced gains in economic factors, education indicators have stagnated. With fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math performance measures, Maine was near the middle nationally, and amongst New England states, last in reading and fourth in math. And despite a slight increase in enrollment in public preschool between 2016 and 2017, Maine continued to lag behind the national rate for children ages 3 and 4 not enrolled in early education programs at 57 percent, versus 52 percent not enrolled nationally.

Since 1990, at 18 percent Maine and Vermont experienced the highest child population decline in the nation. While Maine's overall child population decreased by 55,432 between 1990 and 2017, the non-white child population nearly tripled during that same time period, with the state adding 14,916 non-white children, while the number of white children decreased by 70,348 or 24 percent. Currently in Maine, the non-white child population is 9.2 percent, compared to 2.7 percent in 1990.

"When the child population declines by almost 20 percent in a generation, it has a real impact on communities," said Helen Hemminger, MCA's research and KIDS COUNT associate. "Schools close, businesses close and families move away, impacting our workforce. It is important that we focus now on what we can do to keep young people in Maine, and attract new workers and families from other states and countries to help reverse this trend."

The Casey Foundation points to areas of tremendous improvement in children's lives in the 30 years of documenting the well-being of children—including access to health care, decreased rates of teen childbearing and decreased rates of teenagers not working and not in school—and draws a direct line to policies that support this success.

- Due to the Affordable Care Act, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and other national health policies, the U.S. rate of uninsured children went from 13 percent with no coverage in 1990 to 5 percent in 2017. In Maine, this rate improved from 10 percent to 5 percent.
- Due to strategies to keep kids in school as well as juvenile justice reforms, far fewer youth were disconnected from work and school in the most recent years. In the U.S. in 1990, 11 percent of youth ages 16-19 were neither working nor in school. By 2017, that rate was down to six percent – a 45 percent improvement. In Maine, the rate went from seven percent to five percent and from 5,237 youth to 3,120 youth - an improvement of 29 percent.
- Access to health education and to contraceptives has led to a significant reduction in the teen birth rate. In 1990, the U.S. rate was 60 teen births per 1,000 females ages 15-19. Twenty-seven years later, in 2017, the U.S. rate was 19 teen births per 1,000 females. Similarly, in Maine the rate declined by 70 percent, from 43 teen births to 13 per 1,000 females ages 15-19.

There are steps that policymakers should take to help all children thrive now and in the future. The Casey Foundation calls on elected officials and representatives to:

- *Expand the programs that make and keep kids healthy.* For the sake of all children, states should expand access to Medicaid.
- *Provide the tools proven to help families lift themselves up economically.* Federal and state earned income tax credits (EITC) and child tax credit programs mean working parents can get back more of their hard-earned money to provide for their children's needs.
- *Address ethnic and racial inequalities.* The national averages of child well-being can mask the reality that black and brown children still face a greater number of obstacles to reaching their full potential.

- *Count all kids.* Ensure the 2020 census counts all children, especially those under 5 years old and those living in hard-to-count communities.

“America’s children are one-quarter of our population and 100 percent of our future,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Lisa Hamilton. “All of the 74 million kids in our increasingly diverse country have unlimited potential, and we have the data, knowledge and evidence to create the policies that will help them realize it. It’s incumbent upon us to do just that.”

Release Information

The 2019 KIDS COUNT® *Data Book* will be available June 17th at 12:01 AM EST 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 Maine Children’s Alliance

The Maine Children’s Alliance is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates for sound public policies and promotes best practices for Maine children, youth and families. Learn more at www.mekids.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.