

UNDER EMBARGO until Monday, June 17 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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Maryland's Financial Investments and Critical Policy Reforms Improved Children's Lives; Time to Recommit to Efforts

30th *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* data show Maryland advances but certain challenges remain

Baltimore, Maryland—In the past 30 years, Maryland has made significant advances in childhood education and pediatric health care because of its strong financial investments and successful critical reforms. Now, with the state stuck at 14 in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2019 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*'s child well-being rankings, it is time for a renewed commitment to furthering the well-being of Maryland's children.

"Advocates for Children and Youth is proud to have been at the forefront of reforms that have led to a real improvement in outcomes over the last 30 years," said Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, executive director of Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY). "However, the 2019 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is a stark reminder that more must be done, particularly to improve outcomes for black and brown youth who continue to be left behind by our policies and systems."

The 2019 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States, shows measurable progress for children nationwide since its first publication in 1990. The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being.

One area where Maryland has made considerable progress in the last 30 years is education. The Thornton Commission — established by the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002 — created a statewide school-aid formula to attempt to ensure that a zip code did not determine a child's education. Each year since the formula's enactment, there has been marked improvement in education, especially in reading proficiency.

While this reform, which ACY was instrumental in passing, led to improvements in education outcomes, more work must be done to sustain this progress. Maryland still sees marked disparities in access to quality education; nearly half of Maryland's Black and Latino students attend school in one of the three most underfunded districts in the state and receive \$4,000 less per pupil than the Thornton Commission recommended.

"African American and Latino students have less access to preschool opportunities, less access to advanced placement courses and are four times more likely to be suspended than their white peers," said Shamoyia Gardiner, senior associate for education policy at Advocates for Children and Youth. "It is not that students of color are less academically capable, it is because of systemic issues that have racialized these outcomes."

This year, the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education or Kirwan Commission made programmatic recommendations and funding levels to rectify these disparities. As it stands today, Maryland ranks 11th in education.

Advocates for Children and Youth was also on the forefront of the health care push —from being an instrumental player in the introduction of Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHIP) to working on the state's preparation and implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Since then, Maryland has made great strides in pediatric health-insurance coverage. The Act meant that Maryland's children could stay on the parent's insurance until 26 — a benefit that now applies to the state's foster youth; preventive care is available with no co-pays or deductibles; children are no longer denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions; and there are no longer financial caps to their care. In most recent years, there has also been a push to stabilize drug prices to ensure accessibility to necessary treatment. These reforms are clearly working; in 1990, more than 152,000 children lacked health insurance. In 2017, fewer than 54,000 children were without health insurance. Even with these important advances, Maryland still ranked 15th in health.

Maryland ranked 12th in the percentage of children living in poverty. Children of color make up a majority of the children living in poverty in Maryland with African American children making up half (80,000) of the 160,000 while 34,000 are Hispanic children. “Maryland’s deeply racialized history creates a two-tiered society and limits the potential and economic future of everyone in the state,” said Nonso Umunna, Advocates for Children and Youth’s research director.

The Census

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows how essential accurate data is to sound policymaking. The 2010 census missed 2.2 million kids under 5 years old, and the upcoming count may miss even more if young children are not a priority. The stakes are high: 55 major federal programs, including Head Start and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, allocate more than \$880 billion each year based on census data. It is estimated that 15 percent or 53,000 of Maryland’s kids are at risk of being undercounted in the upcoming 2020 census, putting federally funded supports that have driven youth success in jeopardy. The potential undercount could cost the state roughly \$2.5 billion in federal funding across 10 programs aimed at helping children and youth.

In Maryland, an accurate census is important for several reasons. “Although Maryland is one of the richest states in the nation, it still needs federal funds to help address the disparities that children of color and children in under-resourced communities face,” said Umunna. “When children are not counted, state and local agencies face losing billions of federal dollars for supports — like education, school lunches, Head Start, Medicaid, SNAP, CHIP — that have maintained or improved gains to ensure our most vulnerable have the opportunity to start a healthy life.”

“Maryland considers itself a leader, but we can do better in leading the way for our children and youth. By focusing on policies, programs and funding that will close those disparity gaps, we will improve outcomes for all our children,” said Bevan-Dangel. “Advocates for Children and Youth is the only group working across Maryland and across all issue areas to impact every aspect of a child’s life. For the sake of the 1.3 million children who call Maryland home, we must do more.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation points to areas of tremendous improvement in children’s lives — including access to health care, decreased rates of teen childbearing and increased rates of high school graduation — and draws a direct line to policies that support this success. Especially as the child population is expanding, there are steps that policymakers should take to help all children thrive. The Casey Foundation calls on elected officials and representatives to:

- *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 use more of their take-home pay to meet their children’s needs.
- *Address ethnic and racial inequities.* The national averages of child well-being can mask the reality that black and brown children still face a greater number of obstacles.
- *Count all kids.* Ensure the 2020 census counts all children, especially those under 5 years old and from hard-to-count areas.

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the 30th edition of an annual data study that is based on U.S. Census and other publicly available data, representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

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Release Information

The *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 17 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. 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 Advocates for Children and Youth

Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide nonprofit that improves the lives and experiences of Maryland's children by advancing policies and programs that tackle disparities facing our children and youth and close racial equity gaps in the areas of education, child welfare, health, economic security and youth justice. For more information on how we do our work, please visit us as www.acy.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.

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