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North Dakota ranked 12th in child well-being. But does that tell the whole story?

While North Dakota ranks high in some areas of child well-being, many children and families are getting left behind, especially kids and families of color. The *2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book* developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranked North Dakota as top in the nation for children's economic well-being. However, one data point does not tell the whole story. Thousands of North Dakota children live in poverty, and Black, Indigenous, and other families of color disproportionately struggle to access secure employment and affordable housing.

"North Dakota's high ranking in economic well-being shows that some families are doing better, however one of my biggest concerns is that someone will look at North Dakota's top ranking and decide the work is done," said Xanna Burg, KIDS COUNT Coordinator with North Dakota KIDS COUNT. "There is so much more to the story. Nearly 18,000 children live in poverty in North Dakota, and children of color experience higher poverty rates. If the ranking focused solely on the well-being of children of color, North Dakota would fall toward the bottom."

Poverty and other data used in the report rankings are from the year or two before the pandemic. It will take a few years to get a complete picture of the hardship families faced the past year, but the data shows that many families are struggling. Survey data from last year adds to the story, showing 16 percent of households with children were unsure they could pay their next rent or mortgage payment.

Unfortunately, Black, Indigenous, and other families of color reported even higher uncertainty for making housing payments last year. The reality today for many children and families has been shaped by generations of discriminatory policies and limited access to the economic resources that other families have had. To move North Dakota forward, now is the time to invest in solutions that ensure all children grow up in families with the resources and support needed to thrive.

In addition to economic stability, the *2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book* includes data on education, health, and the communities where children live. Highlights from the report findings for North Dakota include:

- **Economic:** Nearly 1 in 6 children (28,000) lived in households that paid more than 30 percent of their income on housing, showing improvement over the last four years.
- **Education:** Two-thirds of fourth graders did not read at grade level, the same as a decade ago.
- **Health:** More children are going without health insurance in North Dakota, leaving 15,000 North Dakota children without adequate access to health care.
- **Family and Community:** The teen birth rate continued to drop to a record low in 2019.

North Dakota KIDS COUNT recommends policymakers set the minimum wage to be more than poverty wages so families can afford basic necessities. The state should also consider more investments in early childhood education programs, like the four-year-old grant program passed by the state legislature this spring, to support young children and working families.

This KIDS COUNT report is an annual report detailing data for 16 different measures in four categories for all 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The Foundation recommends the federal child tax credit be made permanent, which lifts millions of kids above the poverty line nationwide. The report can be found at <https://www.aecf.org/databook>.

About North Dakota KIDS COUNT

North Dakota KIDS COUNT is a leading resource for data on child and family well-being in the state and is dedicated to providing current, relevant, and reliable data to shape the issues affecting North Dakota children and families. More information can be found at ndkidscount.org. North Dakota KIDS COUNT is a project of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization providing in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. The Montana Budget & Policy Center also leads the KIDS COUNT work in Montana and South Dakota. More information can be found at www.montanabudget.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. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Kids Count* report can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

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