



children's
defense fund
ohio

***For Immediate Release ***

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Ohio's national rank in child well-being paints a sobering pre-COVID-19 picture for leaders as they respond to the current public health and focus on economic recovery

Ohio ranks 31st nationally in the KIDS COUNT® Index that measures child economic, educational, health, and family and community well-being and fell from 16th to 28th in the education domain. Children's Defense Fund-Ohio urges leaders to focus policies to make positive progress on child well-being as they navigate the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath.

COLUMBUS — New national data show that Ohio has a long road ahead to improving conditions to support child well-being. This moment calls us to reflect on the kind of community we want to build as we move forward. The latest data show how our current policies and funding setup is failing to meet the needs of too many children and youth in Ohio. Let's build a better future by building a strong foundation of well-being for our children.

The National KIDS COUNT® Index shows that Ohio ranks 31st across 16 indicators of child well-being. The data serve as critical benchmarks of Ohio's progress before COVID-19. Children's Defense Fund-Ohio urges state legislators and administrators to highlight these measures as indicators of their performance in navigating this crisis. The data and rankings are included in the *2020 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

"Ohio has an opportunity to protect child well-being as we move into the recovery phase of this pandemic," says Tracy Najera, Executive Director. "These measures must stay front and center as we make crucial decisions in response to the health crisis and the resulting budget crisis. We cannot allow our children and families to move backwards."

Ohio ranks in the bottom half of the nation on 10 out of the 16 indicators, coming in 37th in three areas: percentage of students who didn't graduate on time; children in single-parent families; and children living in high-poverty areas. In 2017/18, the most recent year for which data are available, 18% of Ohio's students didn't graduate on time, in contrast to the neighboring states of Kentucky and West Virginia, where only 10% of students didn't. By investing in education and wrap-around services for students, our leaders have an opportunity to ensure that every student graduates despite extended school closures.

In previous years, Ohio showed the most promise in the indicators measuring education. Education enables our young people to contribute their talents to our communities. Unfortunately, we fell from 16th to 28th in the 2020 rankings in the education domain, declining in all four indicators. 62% of Ohio 8th graders were not proficient in math and 64% of 4th graders were not proficient in reading in 2019. Further, 56% of 3 and 4 year olds were not attending preschool or engaged in early learning experiences, and 18% of students did not graduate on time, increasing from 16% in the previous year. Though Ohio appears to be doing well in comparison to neighboring states, we must do better by our young people so they have the skills to take on tomorrow's challenges. (The KIDS COUNT Index uses a national measure of proficiency, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, rather than state-level report cards, in order to provide comparisons between states). These pre-COVID education benchmarks are critical to highlight as we recover from lost learning time and close budget gaps so that our young people return to schools that empower them for lifelong success.

On health measures, Ohio ranks in the bottom half of nation. These measures include low birth-weight babies, child and teen deaths, and a new measure this year, teen obesity. At a rank of 24th, Ohio rises to the top half in only one measure: percentage of children with health insurance. Ohio's share of children who lack health insurance will only increase unless we take concerted action to swiftly meet the needs of our workforce who find themselves out of work and without health insurance. As Ohio's unemployment rolls grew in the last two months to over 1.3 million, we must remember that many of these individuals have children who are also losing their employer-sponsored health coverage.

If we act now, we can protect our communities so that there is less to rebuild. We need our legislators to act quickly and channel resources strategically. Any of the possible paths ahead will be difficult. Let's choose one that leads to the future we want for our children.

The Children's Defense Fund-Ohio will mail every legislator in the state a copy of the Ohio KIDS COUNT Index Profile for reference.

The full report can be found at aecf.org/databook.

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About Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.