Economic Hardships Continue to Put Florida’s Children at Risk

*Florida Slips to 45th among the 50 States in Economic Well-Being of Children in KIDS COUNT National Index*

While the nation is showing signs of positive growth in economic trends, Florida is still a state struggling to provide for its children according to new data in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Data Book released today. Policymakers and child advocates in our state can use this comprehensive child well-being index to see where Florida is remaining stagnant or slightly behind the improvements other states have garnered. The expanded index implemented last year is used to focus on four domains believed to be integral to the welfare and success of children: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community.

The national overall ranking of Florida remains at 38, positioning Florida among the bottom ranked states for more than two decades. While the National and State Profile Sheet determines improvement status by comparisons to earlier data; Florida KIDS COUNT examined last year’s figures to find that our state remained the same on 8 indicators, showed nearly immeasurable improvement on 6 indicators, and that poverty continues to envelop many more of our children and their families.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children Living in Poverty</td>
<td>924,000</td>
<td>980,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children Living in High-Poverty Areas</td>
<td>2006-10</td>
<td>2007-11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>341,000</td>
<td>427,000</td>
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One in four of Florida’s children are living in poverty. These statistics are based on a very conservative measure of hardship, meaning that the number of children living in economically fragile homes is certainly much larger. The official poverty line in 2011 was $22,811 for a family of two adults and two children, while research estimates that families typically need twice that amount to meet basic needs. The outlook looks bleak for these numbers to improve with over a third of Florida’s children having parents that lack secure employment, and almost half living in households with high burden housing cost.

“It’s a sad day when a family of four earning $40,000 a year expend over 30 percent of their income on shelter alone. This does not include other very basic needs such as utilities, food, clothing, transportation, or maintaining the home,” said Susan Weitzel, Florida KIDS COUNT director. “We need policies that provide a rapid response to attain affordable housing. Without addressing income disparity for homeowners and renters alike, we will continue to challenge the well-being of Florida’s children.”

Research shows children in poor families who are provided with support in their youth do better in school performance which translates to income gains later in life. Weitzel added, “We must invest in our families now to see meaningful advances in these well-being indicators and rise to the top of the rankings for the future of our children.”


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