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Van Buren County ranked 55 statewide in child well-being by 2019 Kids Count book

LANSING—Van Buren County ranked 55 for child well-being by county, according to the *2019 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* released by the Michigan League for Public Policy. No. 1 is the best in the state.

Now in its 27th year, the annual Kids Count in Michigan data book analyzes and evaluates the well-being of children in the state and its communities, and identifies policy recommendations to improve outcomes for kids. The 2019 book primarily compares data from 2012 to 2017 and analyzes 16 key indicators across four domains: Economic Security, Health & Safety, Family & Community, and Education.

The *2019 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* also analyzes and ranks 82 of the 83 counties for overall child well-being (Keweenaw County lacks sufficient data). The overall child well-being rank is based on a county's rank in 14 of the 16 measures; infant mortality and child and teen deaths are excluded as many counties do not have sufficient data on those two indicators.

The top five counties for child well-being in 2019 are Livingston (1st), Clinton (2nd), Ottawa (3rd), Oakland (4th), and Washtenaw (5th). The bottom five counties in 2019 are Lake (82nd), Luce (81st), Alcona (80th), Schoolcraft (79th), and Muskegon (78th).

Here is how Van Buren County ranked in each Kids Count in Michigan child well-being indicator:

Indicators	2017 Rate	Percent Change from 2012 (Negative Number Means Rate Decrease)	County Rank**
ECONOMIC SECURITY			
Children in poverty, ages 0-17	18.1%	-32.5%	31
Young children, ages 0-5, in the Food Assistance Program	29.0%	-30.9%	61
Students receiving free/reduced-price school lunches	54.5%	5.4%	34
HEALTH			
Less than adequate prenatal care	40.1%	10.6%	61
Low-birthweight babies	6.6%	-8.6%	27
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	6.1	8.9%	23
Child/Teen deaths, ages 1-19 (per 100,000)	24.7	-25.6%	19
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY			
Births to teens, ages 15-19 (per 1,000)	27.1	-30.8%	60

Child abuse/neglect: Children in investigated families (per 1,000)	142.1	25.9%	38
Child abuse/neglect: Confirmed victims (per 1,000)	24.7	9.4%	45
Children in out-of-home care (per 1,000)	8.9	47.8%	66
EDUCATION			
3- and 4-year-olds not in preschool	63.2%	14.4%	69
Students not graduating on time	20.5%	-21.4%	51
Students NOT College Ready	70.9%	6.5%	53
Not proficient (M-STEP): Third-graders (English Language Arts)	56.1%	10.0%	48
Not proficient (M-STEP): Eighth-graders (Math)	75.0%	2.2%	56

*Sometimes a rate could not be calculated because of low incidence of events or unavailable data.

**Number of counties ranked varies by indicator (45 for infant mortality, 50 for child/teen deaths).

Comparing counties from 2012 to 2017, 79 counties saw an improvement in their child poverty rate. Sixty-three counties saw a worsening trend in the share of births to mothers receiving adequate prenatal care, but 76 counties saw a reduction in their teen birth rate. The rate of child victims of abuse and neglect increased in 62 counties, and 76 counties experienced an increase in children placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect. In Education, the rate of students not graduating on time improved in 58 counties, however, communities are still struggling to support third-grade reading with 65 counties seeing a decline in proficiency.

“The Kids Count data book has been working to draw attention to pervasive child poverty for years, as 1 in 5 kids is still unacceptable, and it’s even higher for kids of color. Plus, the alarming increase in child abuse and neglect underscores the urgency of the issues facing our kids,” said Alicia Guevara Warren, Kids Count in Michigan project director. “A family’s lack of economic security affects a child’s well-being in many ways, and we can address these challenges early and holistically, as the book contains concrete recommendations for policymakers to better support kids and families.”

The data book continues to connect its data findings with policy recommendations to improve child well-being, including raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction from 17 to 18 years old, strengthening policies that support work, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and expanding home visitation programs to help provide additional support to families. Many of these policy improvements are being discussed in ongoing state budget negotiations. A summary of the 2019 book’s key data findings and policy recommendations can be found on the League’s website, mlpp.org.

“The Kids Count book shows that right now, too many Michigan kids and families aren’t getting the support they need,” said Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. “That’s why my budget makes the biggest investment in our public schools in a generation of kids and invests in two-generation policies that make a meaningful difference in early childhood education, close the gap between wealthy and poor schools, and create Michigan Reconnect scholarships to provide college and career training opportunities. Also, strong social policies like Double Up Food Bucks to increase access to healthy foods, reliable transportation, safe schools and neighborhoods, and access to clean water will build strong communities and healthy families.”

In order to make this year's data book as bright and vibrant as Michigan's kids, Kids Count and the Michigan League for Public Policy asked children from around the state to submit artwork to show "what it's like to be a kid in Michigan." Nearly 100 entries were submitted and many are featured throughout the book.

For additional information on the *2019 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book*, including the full report, state, county and regional rankings, charts and images, resources for advocates, and county-specific profiles and press releases for 82 counties, go to <https://mlpp.org/kids-count/michigan-2019-data-book>.

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The Michigan League for Public Policy, www.mlpp.org, is a nonprofit policy institute focused on economic opportunity for all. It is the only state-level organization that addresses poverty in a comprehensive way.