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UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 12:01 AM on April 23, 2019

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2019 Kids Count Data Book: Michigan kids demand action on policy solutions to improve their well-being, address ongoing challenges

Child abuse and neglect increased by nearly one-third, foster care placements up; child poverty, teen pregnancy and high school graduation rates improve

LANSING—Michigan continues to see an alarming increase in child abuse and neglect, with confirmed cases up 29.5 percent since 2012, according to the *2019 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* released today by the Michigan League for Public Policy. And despite a 20.6 percent drop in the state's child poverty rate, almost half a million Michigan kids—roughly 1 in 5—are still living in poverty.

"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, which is impacting our youngest children the most, 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, from their living conditions and nutrition to their mental and emotional stress, and can lead to unsafe homes. But we can address these challenges early and holistically, as the book contains concrete recommendations for policymakers to improve the lives of kids and families, including proven home visitation programs that help support families as they navigate the challenges we all face in parenthood."

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:** The state saw big drops in children ages 0-17 in poverty and kids 5 and under in the Food Assistance Program, but the overall number (416,305) and percentage (19.6 percent) of kids living in poverty remains staggering.
- **Health & Safety:** Expectant mothers not receiving adequate prenatal care continues to be an area of concern with that rate increasing 10.6 percent, and low-birthweight babies, infant mortality and child/teen deaths have leveled off.
- **Family & Community:** The rates of investigated and confirmed cases of abuse and neglect both went up almost one-third, and children in out-of-home care increased as well. Michigan saw a 30.9 percent reduction in teen births.
- **Education:** One in 5 high school students are still not graduating on time, despite a 16.6 percent drop in the rate, and fewer Michigan kids are in preschool, proficient in third-grade reading or college ready.

“Kids aren’t political and their well-being shouldn’t be, either. Greater investments are needed if we are going to make Michigan a better place to live, raise a family and simply be a kid,” said Michele Corey, Chair of the Kids Count in Michigan Advisory Committee and Vice President for Programs for Michigan’s Children. “But the Kids Count data is only as powerful as the action it generates, and we hope legislators will have this book in their hands and on their minds as they begin making important funding decisions in the coming months.”

“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.”

Because of historic and systemic policies and inaction to treat the diverse needs of diverse kids, major racial disparities are found in nearly every Kids Count indicator. A disproportionate number of African American children are placed in foster care, and they have been systematically overrepresented in the total number of victims of child abuse and neglect. African American babies are more than two times as likely to die before their first birthdays than White babies, and the infant mortality rate has been increasing for Latinx babies. Kids of color are much less likely to be proficient in reading by third grade than their peers, meaning they could soon be more likely to be held back by the state’s Read by Grade Three law taking effect in 2020. Students of color are also less likely to be college ready, altering their higher education, career and earnings opportunities due to systemic barriers.

“Poverty and racial equity may not seem like easy issues to tackle, but just as they were often generated by past public policies, they can be offset by future ones,” said Gilda Z. Jacobs, President and CEO for the Michigan League for Public Policy. “Many of these policy improvements were included in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s state budget—from greater investment in education and better access to preschool, college and skills training to increasing the state Earned Income Tax Credit—and stand to benefit every corner of the state if the Legislature supports them.”

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. A summary of the 2019 book’s key data findings and policy recommendations can be found on the League’s website.

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), Washtenaw (3rd), Ottawa (4th), and Oakland (5th). The bottom five counties in 2019 are Lake (82nd), Alcona (81st), Luce (80th), Muskegon (79th), and Manistee (78th).

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.

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The Kids Count in Michigan project is part of a broad national effort to improve conditions for children and their families. Funding for the project is provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation, The Skillman Foundation, Steelcase Foundation, Michigan Education Association, American Federation of Teachers Michigan, Ruth Mott Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, United Way for Southeastern Michigan, DTE Energy Foundation, Ford Motor Company Fund, and the Battle Creek Community Foundation. More state and local data are available at the Kids Count Data Center, www.datacenter.kidscount.org.

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.