



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT  
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**UNDER EMBARGO Until December 14, 2020**

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## **Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and the Urgent Need to Respond**

*Rhode Island Data Shows Families with Children Struggling During COVID Crisis; Housing Security, Mental Health, and Hunger Greatest Concerns*

**Providence, RI (December 11, 2020):** Rhode Island performed well on access to health care but is falling short on housing stability, mental health, and child hunger according to *Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and a Roadmap for Recovery*, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how families are faring during the COVID-19 crisis.

This KIDS COUNT report examined data from weekly surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (the Census Pulse Survey) that demonstrate how families across the country are challenged to meet basic needs during this global public health crisis while managing school, work, and mental health. The Foundation finds that the concurrent health and economic crises are exacerbating trends that show vulnerable families are unable to fulfill basic needs.

The report shows how urgent state and federal intervention is to the health and well-being of families with children. In the face of this unparalleled crisis, federal relief packages demonstrated that we can take strong steps to reach children and families in pain. The *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* provided an unprecedented \$1.8 trillion in support to families, businesses and state, local and tribal governments, and the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* guaranteed that most individuals would not bear the costs of COVID-19 testing.

By measuring food security, the ability to make rent or mortgage payments, health insurance status, and mental health concerns, the Casey Foundation identified **four pain points** for children and families that require immediate action. Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, and New Hampshire appeared among the top 10 states in terms of doing better on three or all four of the pain points identified in the report. States in the bottom 10 that were doing worse

on three or all four categories were Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, **Rhode Island**, and Texas.

Percentages of families with children who have experienced challenges as measured by these four indicators are listed below. According to the Census Pulse Survey, in Rhode Island:

- **FOOD SECURITY:** Nearly one in five families with children (18%) said that in the most recent week, there was sometimes or always not enough to eat in their household (compared to U.S. average of 14%).
- **HOUSING STABILITY:** Nearly one in four households with kids (23%) said they had only slight confidence or no confidence at all that they would be able to make their next rent or mortgage payment on time (compared to U.S. average of 18%).
- **MENTAL HEALTH:** A quarter of respondents with children in their households (25%) reported that they had felt down, depressed, or hopeless in the previous week, indicating a widespread need for access to mental health care (compared to U.S. average of 21%).
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** 8% of adults in households with kids did not have health insurance (compared to U.S. average of 12%).

"All children deserve to have their basic needs met in normal times and in times of crisis," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Too many Rhode Islanders were struggling to survive economically before this crisis. Now that the devastating effects of the pandemic are falling on the shoulders of our most vulnerable children and families, we need immediate and sustained action to ensure the best outcomes. Our leaders have taken some important actions to mitigate the effects of the crisis on kids, but Congress needs to do more. We call on Congress to pass another major relief bill that addresses the urgent needs of children and families."

The Annie E. Casey Foundation urges policymakers and child advocates to unite across differences and put COVID-19 response at the top of their 2021 agendas to ensure that children have what they need to survive and thrive. The Annie. E. Casey Foundation calls on elected officials and other decision makers to:

***Put racial and ethnic equity first in policymaking*** by using disaggregated data and engaging community stakeholders. This should ensure that the policymaking process is informed by the diverse perspectives of those hardest hit by the crisis and created in partnership with communities. This approach should underpin any concrete policy actions.

***Prioritize the physical and mental health of all children*** by guaranteeing that any vaccine will be available without cost as a factor and by retaining and strengthening the *Affordable Care Act*. To promote mental health, particularly in times of crisis, policymakers should work to reduce the student-to-school-counselor ratio in all school settings to levels recommended by mental health professionals.

***Help families with children achieve financial stability and bolster their well-being*** by expanding access to unemployment insurance for part-time and gig economy workers, low-wage workers, and students and by expanding child care access. Additionally, policymakers should eliminate barriers to accessing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC). And beyond any temporary housing assistance programs aimed at heading off a foreclosure or eviction crisis, federal policymakers should expand the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program and increase the overall availability of public housing.

***Ensure schools are better funded, more equitably funded and ready to meet the needs of students disparately affected by the pandemic*** by boosting school funding to protect against the economic impact of the pandemic, build maintenance-of-equity requirements into relief packages and address disparities in technology access at home and in the classroom.

“America’s children are in crisis,” said Annie E. Casey Foundation President and CEO Lisa Hamilton. “All across the country, families with children are struggling to overcome an unprecedented convergence of emergencies. We need immediate and decisive action from policymakers that prioritizes equitable solutions to help families survive this catastrophe.”

## **Release Information**

The 2020 KIDS COUNT report will be available December 14 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). 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](http://datacenter.kidscount.org).

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### **About Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children.*

### **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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*