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KIDS COUNT: Children harmed in high-poverty communities
Policy change, investments can make a difference in Michigan

Michigan ranks among the 10 worst states for children living in high-poverty neighborhoods, a new study finds, but there are clear steps to take to improve the lives of kids in those communities.

The report, *Data Snapshot on High-Poverty Communities*, was released by KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It found that Michigan ranked 44th among the states (No. 1 being the best or lowest rate) for concentration of poverty, defined as neighborhoods where 30 percent or more the population is in poverty.

Among the 50 largest U.S. cities, Detroit had the biggest share of children -- two out of every three -- living in concentrated poverty. Poverty is defined as \$22,314 per year or less for a family of four.

"Children from poor neighborhoods, even if their own families are not in poverty, are affected. They struggle more with behavior and emotional problems, they are less likely to graduate and they have reduced potential to be economically successful as adults," said Kids Count in Michigan Project Director Jane Zehnder-Merrell.

There are 341,000 children in high-poverty communities, enough to fill every first-, second- and third-grade private and public classroom seat in the state. That's about 124,000 more children living in high-poverty neighborhoods by 2010 than at the start of the decade, a 57 percent increase. Michigan saw its share of kids in high-poverty neighborhoods climb from 8 percent in 2000 to 14 percent in 2006-2010.

The report found that poverty was concentrated in rural areas as well as large cities. Of the 32 counties with at least one census tract with concentrations of poverty, four were in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. The counties with the largest share of kids in such neighborhoods are Wayne, Saginaw, Alpena, Genesee, Ingham, Chippewa, Roscommon and Isabella.

"As lawmakers gather to decide budget priorities for next year, this report must be kept in mind," said Gilda Z. Jacobs, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Human Services where the Kids Count in Michigan Project is located. "We must use this data to make changes that will make real differences in the lives of our youngest residents of Michigan. Our future depends upon it."

Among policy recommendations in the report is to "promote federal and state policies that advance proven and promising practices in the area of work support, asset building and employment." The chief example is the Earned Income Tax Credit.

(more)

The Michigan EITC has been in place for just four years but has been cut from 20 percent of the federal credit to 6 percent for tax year 2012 and beyond. Restoration of this credit or a portion of the credit would help reduce concentration of poverty.

"This is the most effective tool in our toolbox for lifting children out of poverty," Jacobs said. "Our lawmakers should revisit this policy at the earliest possible time."

In addition, the report adds evidence to the need for a regional transit system in Southeast Michigan that has been backed by Gov. Rick Snyder. The Casey report cites the need to link regions to expand job opportunities.

"With Detroit cited as, by far, America's city with the largest share of kids living in high-poverty neighborhoods, we must take steps here and now to help our next generation of kids," Zehnder-Merrell said. "Improving transit will clearly help."

Another measure is the 90-day law that mandates a pre-foreclosure process set to expire at the end of this year. It should be extended. For more information, see [CEDAM's website](#).

In addition, the Center for Enterprise Development has several recommendations for asset building in Michigan, including lifting asset limits for food and cash assistance and family Medicaid. Click here for [additional recommendations](#).

Some promising developments in Michigan to reduce concentration of poverty also include:

- \$12.5 million for early childhood education in the supplemental budget by Gov. Rick Snyder with \$3.25 million for kindergarten assessment and \$9.25 million for improving quality in early education centers that could improve early education provided in poor neighborhoods.
- Land bank efforts under way in Michigan, particularly in Genesee and Ingham counties, to turn abandoned properties into viable space. For more information, see the [Center for Community Progress](#).

Resources for reporters:

[Data snapshot](#)

[National press release](#)

[Michigan facts and map of poverty by county](#)

[Maps and table of county information](#)

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.

Kids Count in Michigan is part of a national effort to measure the well-being of children at state and local levels. The state project is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation of Baltimore, The Skillman Foundation of Detroit, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, and the Michigan Association of United Ways.

More Michigan data can be found at <http://datacenter.Kidscount.org>.