



children's defense fund minnesota

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 17, 2020

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New Census Data Shows Child Poverty Persists Across America, Even Prior to COVID-19 Pandemic, Especially for Children of Color and Indigenous Children

Saint Paul, Minn. – The Census Bureau has released its annual poverty data indicating that in 2019, 10.5 million American children lived in poverty, among them 143,000 Minnesota children (11.2 percent), making them the poorest age group. While these estimates do not adequately capture the present-day realities of Americans due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, they do reveal the vast racial inequities of income and wealth in Minnesota that have only become more pronounced during this public health crisis.

While some progress was made in reducing overall child poverty this year, continuing the downward trend since 2013, more than one in ten of Minnesota's children remained in poverty last year. Policies and programs that provide for children's basic needs are crucial to ensure better outcomes for these children who remain in poverty and face risks for poor health, nutrition, education and future productivity. Of the 143,000 Minnesota children living in poverty last year, 62,000 (43%) lived in extreme poverty. Our youngest children were the poorest, with 5.2% of children under 5 living in poverty, compared to 4.9% of children under 18. Poverty is defined as an annual income below \$25,926 for a family of four with two children, while extreme poverty is defined as less than \$12,963 per year.

"Year after year, children, particularly children of color, are the poorest Minnesotans, with vast racial disparities for Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Latino, and Asian American children. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our unequal economy was not working for too many families. Inequities and systemic divestment in communities of color have left our children of color and Indigenous children most vulnerable and susceptible to harm during and even before COVID-19. Now, our youngest Americans are being left behind during their critical years of growth and development," said Bharti Wahi, Executive Director of Children's Defense Fund - Minnesota.

While there are more White children in poverty than any other race or ethnicity in Minnesota, the percentage of children of color and American Indian children who live in poverty is higher than Whites. Data show that children of color and American Indian children make up 31 percent of the total Minnesota child population but 64 percent of children in poverty. With 11.2 percent of children in poverty overall, 37.2 percent of Black children, 37.1 percent of American Indian children, 16.8 percent of children of two or more races, 16.5 percent of Latino children, and 12.2 percent of Asian children were poor in Minnesota, compared to 6 percent of White children.

While we saw improvements across most racial groups from last year, the Black child poverty rate increased by 11.3 percent and children of two or more races increased by 17.6 percent. Dianne Haulcy, Senior Vice President for Family Engagement at Think Small and Co-Chair of the Voices and Choices for

Children Coalition said, "This significant increase in Black childhood poverty is egregious in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. This represents the huge opportunity gaps that our children are born into that can lead to a trajectory of gaps in education, employment, housing and health. This is unacceptable and unsustainable."

Historical policies and practices that have prevented people of color and American Indian people from having a fair start continue to be reflected in today's poverty rate disparities. And while White children in Minnesota have one of the lowest child poverty rates in the nation, children of color and American Indian children rank in the lower third of states for their high levels of child poverty. While disaggregation by race is critical to understanding disparities in Minnesota, further disaggregation by cultural group is critical to more fully understand the impact of child poverty on particular cultural communities.

Minnesota Children under age 18 living in poverty and state rank by race/ethnicity, 2019

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent	State Rank
White	51,850	6.0	7
American Indian	5,792	37.1	32
Asian	9,162	12.2	33
Black	45,414	37.2	36
Hispanic/Latino	19,137	16.5	7
Two or More Races	15,636	16.8	25
TOTAL	143,006	11.2	7

Official poverty estimates fail to fully and meaningfully capture all households without adequate income to support a family and do not fully capture the extent of racial disparities. Our current poverty measurement was created in 1963 and has been adjusted only for inflation since that time. This measure hasn't kept pace with the cost of living and does not accurately reflect what a family needs to survive and thrive physically, mentally, and socially.

According to the [EPI Family Budget Calculator](#), for example, a family of four with two children in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area would need an annual income of \$98,675—nearly four times the poverty line—to meet their basic needs. Given that many federal, state, and local programs use the poverty line to determine eligibility for programs like SNAP, school meals, CHIP, Head Start and more, we must ensure it captures all families who need help.

[The most recent Census Pulse Survey data](#) shows that nearly half of adults in households with children in Minnesota (48 percent) report that they or another member of the household have lost employment income since the start of the pandemic. Nearly 10 percent of adults in households with children are behind on rent and 5 percent said their children are not getting enough to eat.

This pandemic has not only exposed how unequal our pre-COVID economy was, and how many families were suffering, but also, as the Household Pulse Survey data has revealed, has increased the number of children living in families that struggle to meet their basic needs. "Millions of families and children are striving for a better future, but the decks are stacked against them due to our leaders' failure to invest in our children—especially children of color.

Historical, systemic racism and institutional barriers over centuries have left our Black and Brown communities without the resources they need to survive and thrive, and politicians' divestments in our communities have only made it worse," said Wahi.

“Child poverty and racial disparities can be sharply decreased by continuing COVID relief measures for families and expanded basic needs programs to help kids learn, grow, and thrive during this pandemic and beyond. We need Congress to take action to counteract the financial pressures facing families and provide additional support to keep our child poverty rates from increasing even more during this time of high unemployment. Relief measures like cash assistance, child allowances, rental and housing support, SNAP, and unemployment insurance all need to be expanded to mitigate this crisis and help families survive this pandemic. Investing in children and their healthy development not only helps our economy thrive, but helps reduce racial disparities and improve opportunities for children in the long-run,” continued Wahi.

Later this fall, the Minnesota KIDS COUNT Data Book will be released with updated data on how children are faring, focusing on family economic stability and including children’s access to health care, early childhood education, nutritious food and many other indicators of child well-being in Minnesota.

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Note to Editors: Poverty is defined as an annual income below \$25,750 for an average family of four, or less than \$2,145 per month or \$ 70.55 per day. Extreme poverty is half that level. Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) estimates the annual costs of living in Minnesota for two adult workers with two children to range from just more than \$60,000 (\$14.40 per hour per full-time worker) in most rural counties to more than \$100,000 (\$24 per hour per full-time worker) per year in metro area counties.

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The Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.