



children's defense fund

Leave No Child Behind®

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, September 12, 2018

Media Contact:

Emily Gardner, Communications Director
202-662-3554
egardner@childrensdefense.org

Our National Disgrace: Census Data Points to Continued Child Poverty Crisis

Too many children, especially young children and children of color, live in extreme poverty during critical developmental years

Washington, D.C. – Nearly 1 in 5 children in America live in poverty, making them the poorest age group in our country, according to data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau. Almost one-third of the 39.7 million people in poverty in the United States are children. While the data show a slight reduction in child poverty in 2017, the number of poor children – 12.8 million, 17.5 percent of all children – remains unacceptably high. And though unemployment numbers continue to fall, these gains have not kept families and children out of poverty. More than 70 percent of poor children come from working families.

Shamefully, the youngest children are the poorest children. During the most critical stage for brain development, 3.9 million children under 5 lived in extreme poverty in 2017 – 55,000 more than in the previous year. Poverty is defined as an annual income below \$25,283 for a family of four (less than \$2,107 a month). Extreme poverty is half of that level: an annual income of \$12,642 for a family of four (less than \$1,054 a month).

The odds continue to be stacked against children of color. Children of color made up more than two-thirds of all poor children in 2017. Among Black children, 28.7 percent were living in poverty, while 36.2 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native, 25 percent of Hispanic and 12.2 percent of Asian/ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander children were poor.

“While even a small reduction in the number of poor children is good news, the fact that nearly one in five children in America lives in poverty is morally and practically unacceptable,” said Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children’s Defense Fund. “That our youngest children are the poorest group of children is a shameful indictment of our values and our common sense and how our nation – one of the wealthiest in the world – takes care of our most vulnerable. How shockingly wrong-headed it is that Congress and the White House continue to propose debilitating cuts to survival programs poor children and their families depend on to buy groceries, see the doctor, and find a place to live, while at the same time giving huge tax breaks to wealthy corporations and individuals. Babies’ survival needs should trump billionaires’ greed.

Our children's present and future lives are too valuable to let these profoundly unjust practices continue. These proposals must be rejected and every single person in America must stand up and act to end child poverty now."

Data released by the Census Bureau today also made clear why we must protect programs reducing child poverty. Data from the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) expands on the Official Poverty Measure by analyzing the impact of various government and other programs on family resources. The SPM suggests that in 2017, millions of children were lifted out of poverty by survival programs including:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps: 1.4 million children
- Housing subsidies: 897,000 children
- National School Lunch Program: 722,000 children
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): 156,000 children
- Supplemental Security Income Program: 472,000 children
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and general assistance: 296,000 children
- Earned Income Tax Credit and other refundable credits: 4.5 million children

The Children's Defense Fund believes no child should live in poverty and all children must be afforded the opportunities they need to reach their full potential. Protecting children against the lifelong consequences of poverty will improve their life and reduce child poverty in future generations. We have the resources to end child poverty and now must create the will to do so. We cannot afford to wait. The future of our children—and our nation—depends on it.

###

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for more than 40 years to ensure a level playing field for all children.

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.

CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.