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New Census Data Reveals Continued Child Poverty Crisis in America

About 1 in 6 children live in poverty, with children of color disproportionately impacted by America’s failure to act

Washington, D.C. – About 1 in 6 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 38.1 million people in poverty in the United States are children. While the data show a reduction in child poverty in 2018, the number of poor children – 11.9 million, 16.2 percent of all children – remains unacceptably high. 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, 3.5 million children under 5 were poor in 2018, with 1.6 million of those children living in extreme poverty. Poverty is defined as an annual income below $25,465 for a family of four with two children (less than $2,122 a month). Extreme poverty is half of that level: an annual income of $12,732 for a family of four (less than $1,061 a month).

The odds continue to be stacked against children of color. Children of color made up nearly three-quarters of all poor children in 2017. Nearly one in four children of color in America is poor, with children of color more than 2.5 times more likely to be poor than White children.

“Children continue to be left behind as a result of our country’s failure to address poverty,” said Max Lesko, national executive director for the Children’s Defense Fund. “Growing up poor takes a toll on a child that can last a lifetime. And the fact that children of color continue to be disproportionately harmed by the child poverty crisis is unacceptable. America must do better.”

Data released by the Census Bureau today also made clear why we must not only protect, but further invest in programs proven to reduce 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 2018, 10.7 million children were lifted out of poverty by programs and policies including:
• Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps: 1.3 million children
• Housing subsidies: 926,000 children
• National School Lunch Program: 702,000 children
• Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): 160,000 children
• Supplemental Security Income Program: 515,000 children
• Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and general assistance: 209,000 children
• Earned Income Tax Credit and other refundable credits: 4.2 million children

“Enough is enough. We know how to reduce child poverty in this country. The 10.7 million children lifted out of poverty last year by effective policies and programs like SNAP proves it. Now we need to invest in these proven programs to lift millions more children out of poverty and ensure every child in America, no matter their race, background, or zip code, can live up to their full potential.”

In April of this year, the Children’s Defense Fund released its latest Ending Child Poverty Now report, which showed that the United States could lift millions out of poverty now by improving and investing in existing policies and programs to increase employment, make work pay and meet children’s basic needs. The report detailed how investing an additional 1.4 percent of the federal budget into these proven policies and programs could reduce child poverty at least 57 percent, lift 5.5 million children out of poverty and make an immediate down payment on ending child poverty for all children.

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