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NATIONAL CHILD ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION SOUNDS ALARM FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN IN CRISIS

Comprehensive report from the Children's Defense Fund shows that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, children were the poorest age group in America, with children of color and young children struggling most

WASHINGTON, DC – Today the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) released their annual *State of America's Children* report that captures the dire conditions many young people, particularly children of color, are facing. The 86-page report offers a comprehensive overview of the well-being of America's children to inform discussions around policy and legislative prescriptions to support the advancement of children across the country. The report also shows that Black and Brown children have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, driving more of them deeper into poverty.

"When it comes to the harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, children are not immune. Children are being impacted at every level: physically, economically, academically, socially, and psychologically. As we consider child well-being in this country, this year's *State of America's Children* report gives special attention to the various impacts of the pandemic. All 73 million of our children have been impacted by the sense of uncertainty and disruption of routine COVID-19 has caused, with our Black youth especially vulnerable to 2020's converging crises," said **CDF President and CEO Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson**. "A year marked by such dramatic change and drastic negative impact on children's lives must be followed by one of healing and restoration with intentional disciplined reflection, radical imagination, and bold action."

The State of America's Children 2021 report comes at a critical time, as the nation's children continue to struggle through the pandemic and economic downturn of the last year. The report offers the clearest evidence to support the inclusion of robust, targeted assistance for America's children in the American Rescue Plan Act passed earlier this month, which builds on prior efforts to provide relief for children and families, works to address the economic and racial injustices COVID-19 has exacerbated, and takes a long-overdue step toward ending our nation's shameful child poverty crisis by *cutting child poverty in half*. It extends key supports that have been helping families impacted by the crisis for the past year, like housing and nutrition assistance, includes long-awaited investments in child care and education that will finally help get children back in schools and parents back to work, and means millions of parents will receive a new per-child allowance.

These legislative priorities championed by CDF are vital for the millions of children struggling to survive under conditions that have been laid bare during the coronavirus crisis, and the report makes clear that critical investments must be extended, strengthened, and made permanent to achieve CDF's vision of a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive.

Key findings include:

- **Child Poverty:** Children remain the poorest age group in America, with children of color and young children suffering the highest poverty rates.
 - Nearly 1 in 7 children—more than 10.5 million—were poor in 2019.
 - Nearly 71 percent of poor children were children of color.
 - More than 1 in 4 Black children and more than 1 in 5 Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native children were poor compared with 1 in 12 white children.
 - More than 1 in 6 children under six were poor and almost half lived in extreme poverty below half the poverty line.
- **Housing and Homelessness:** The lack of affordable housing and federal rental assistance leaves millions of children homeless or at risk of homelessness.
 - More than 1 in 3 children live in households burdened by housing costs, meaning more than 30 percent of their family income goes toward housing.
 - More than 1.5 million children enrolled in public schools experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year.
 - 74 percent of unhoused students during the 2017-2018 school year were living temporarily with family or friends.
- **Child Hunger and Nutrition:** Millions of children live in food-insecure households, lacking reliable access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food.
 - More than 1 in 7 children—10.7 million—were food insecure, meaning they lived in households where not everyone had enough to eat. Black and Hispanic children were twice as likely to live in food-insecure households as white children.
 - The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helped feed 17 million children in Fiscal Year 2018—nearly a quarter of all children in America.
 - Half of all families that received SNAP in 2019 were not able to get enough healthy food, however, because SNAP benefits were too low. Among households with children, monthly SNAP benefits averaged just \$118 a person—or less than \$4 a day.
- **Child Health:** Our children have lost the health coverage they need to survive and thrive at an alarming rate.
 - An estimated 4.4 million children under age 19, were uninsured—an increase of 320,000 more children without health insurance since 2018.
 - Disparities in health insurance coverage persist. The rates of uninsured children are especially high among Hispanic children, undocumented children, children living in the South, and children in families with lower incomes.
- **Early Childhood:** The high cost of child care and lack of early childhood investments leaves many children without quality care during critical years of brain development.
 - Center-based infant care costs more than public college tuition in 28 states and the District of Columbia in 2019. More than 80 percent of two-child families were paying more for child care than for rent.
 - During the 2018-2019 school year, only 34 percent of 4-year-olds and 6 percent of 3-year-olds were enrolled in a state-funded preschool program.

- **Education:** America’s schools have slipped backwards into patterns of deep racial and socioeconomic segregation, perpetuating achievement gaps.
 - In 2017, 60 percent of Black children attended high-poverty schools with a high share of students of color while fewer than 9 percent of white children did.
 - More than 77 percent of Hispanic and more than 79 percent of Black fourth and eighth grade public school students were not proficient in reading or math in 2019, compared with less than 60 percent of white students.
- **Child Welfare:** For the first time since 2012, the number of children in the child welfare system fell, but too many children wind up in foster care because of poverty.
 - Black and American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) families are disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system. Nationally, Black and AI/AN children are represented in foster care at a rate 1.66 and 2.84 times their portion of the overall population, respectively.
 - After steadily declining since 2008, the number of children aging out of the foster care system jumped by more than 14 percent in 2019, with 20,445 youth reaching adulthood without a permanent family.
- **Youth Justice:** A disproportionate number of children of color are incarcerated in the juvenile justice and/or adult criminal justice systems, placing them at risk of physical and psychological harm.
 - Despite a 67 percent reduction in child arrests between 2009 and 2019, 530,581 children were arrested in the U.S. and a child or teen was arrested every 59 seconds.
 - Black children were 2.4 times more likely to be arrested and American Indian children were 1.5 times more likely to be arrested than white children.
 - Black youth are nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence, American Indian/Alaska Native youth are almost two times more likely, and Hispanic youth are 40 percent more likely.
- **Gun Violence:** Child and teen gun deaths hit a 19-year high in 2017 and have remained elevated since.
 - In 2019, 3,371 children and teens were killed with guns in America—one every 2 hours and 36 minutes.
 - Black children and teens had the highest gun death rate, followed by American Indian/Alaska Native children and teens. Black children and teens were 4 times more likely to die from gun violence than their white peers
 - The United States has more guns than people—and nearly 1 in 5 are sold without a background check.

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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. We champion [policies](#) and [programs](#) that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education and a moral and spiritual foundation. Supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations, CDF advocates nationwide on behalf of children to ensure children are always a priority.