



# children's defense fund ohio

\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

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## New 2021 KIDS COUNT County Profiles Provide Roadmap for Equity-Driven Recovery Focused on Children & Families

*Measures in children's health, safety, education, and financial well-being should guide federal relief investment decisions to meet the needs of local Ohio communities*

**COLUMBUS** — Although new data profiles show some gains in child well-being prior to the pandemic, a slow, uneven recovery has Ohio child advocates urging for a transparent, data- and equity-driven process to invest federal relief dollars in what matters most for children and families.

Released annually by [Children's Defense Fund-Ohio](#) (CDF-Ohio), the new [2021 KIDS COUNT County Profiles](#) feature sixteen indicators of child wellbeing measuring five domains — health care, safety, homes and communities, finance, and education. These profiles offer a comprehensive snapshot of state, county, and school district level data, and they give unique insight into areas of opportunity where fiscal recovery funds can be used to address now gaping racial and economic divides and stabilize our communities as we emerge from the public health crisis.

"Ohio has a \$12 billion opportunity to create better a future for all Ohio children – no matter their race, income, zip-code, or ability," says Tracy Nájera, Executive Director of Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. "The unique needs of local communities are reflected in the KIDS COUNT profiles we are releasing today and can help guide cities and towns to make the right choices for Ohio's children and families."

The combination of data from before and after the start of the pandemic released by CDF-Ohio provides a critical look at the conditions and challenges faced by children and families:

- **Child Poverty.** Leading up to the pandemic, the number of children in poverty had declined to 18.1% and median income in Ohio rose, but in 2020, unemployment spiked to 8.1% threatening to erase those gains.

- **Family Stability.** Ohio saw a 97% increase in unemployment from 2019 to 2020, 4.1% to 8.1%, resulting in many families throughout the state losing their employment and as a result – their health insurance.
- **Child Health.** Overall, fewer children were enrolled in Medicaid. Children enrolled in Medicaid decreased by almost 2% in FY2020, which covered the start of the public health emergency.
- **Child Education.** Ohio saw almost 86% of students graduating in 2019 within four years, setting a high pre-pandemic benchmark, up from 78% in 2010. To maintain these gains after this last school year, we must ensure children are in a good place behaviorally, emotionally, physically, and ready to learn and thrive.

These measures have likely worsened due to the crippling impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for many families and communities who were on an upward trajectory prior to COVID-19. Reductions in the number of students who were economically disadvantaged for example - from 49.9% to 47.3% in 2019-2020 – underscore that investments made now will be key to preventing positive trends in child wellbeing from not spiraling downward.

One community making strides to implement a robust process to allocate federal funds is Franklin County, whose commissioners hosted a public hearing last month to learn more about the needs in central Ohio and how best to invest almost \$255 million.

“Informed, data driven decisions are what we need to continue our progress during our recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic,” said Franklin County Commissioner Kevin Boyce in a statement anticipating CDF-Ohio's county profile release. “Our Franklin County community understands that when our families are strong our community is even stronger. And that is why we cannot ignore the statistics that show our investment in children and families have improved households across our county prior to the pandemic. If those same efforts are continued as we begin our transition to recovery, we could have the same positive trends in the future if strategic analysis is used to distribute our ARPA funds equitably.”

Pre-pandemic indicators have shown that prioritizing better health outcomes for children is a primary concern in Franklin County. In Franklin County, the infant mortality rate decreased almost 10% from 2018 to 2019, from 7.6 to 6.9 per 1,000 births. Children living in poverty declined from 22.2% to 18.6% within the same years. Since the pandemic started, the rate of low-birthweight babies in Franklin County has decreased from 9.5% of all births to 8.8% in 2020. Pre-pandemic data like this that will be useful in identifying areas of need are included for all 88 of the 2021 KIDS COUNT County profiles.

As part of Children’s Defense Fund Ohio’s commitment to improving equity and outcomes for all children, we recommend communities across Ohio create robust, community-centered recovery plans by developing a process to allocate local funds from the American Rescue Plan Act that includes the following principles:

- **Highlight data:** Use local data like the [KIDS COUNT County Profiles](#) to inform decisions
- **Focus on equity:** Use data disaggregated by race and work toward closing gaps
- **Engage community voice:** Plan public forums, communicate widely and create a process for submitting proposals
- **Prioritize child wellbeing:** Whole child wellbeing requires communities to invest in their economic stability, health, education, and safety

- **Create transparency:** Include processes to submit proposals, including deadlines and final decisions on public websites

“We call on local and state partners to use these data to inform strategies that will not only improve the lives of children and families now but create bold and future-facing policies that ultimately will benefit generations of Ohioans to come,” says Nájera. “How we pivot amidst this pandemic will determine the wellbeing of our communities and their ability to withstand tomorrow’s challenges.”

### **Release Information**

The Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio will distribute every county commissioner and legislator in the state a copy of the 2021 KIDS COUNT County Profile for reference. The full report can be found here: [2021 KIDS COUNT County Profiles](#).

Follow the Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio on Facebook (@CDFS OHIO), Instagram (@cdfohio), and Twitter (@CDF\_Ohio)

### **About Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio**

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.

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