

UNDER EMBARGO  
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## Virginia's Families Struggle with Food and Housing During Pandemic

*Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation show Black families experience higher rates of economic, food and housing insecurity during COVID-19 crisis*

RICHMOND, Va. – Today, Voices for Virginia's Children released new data from [Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and the Urgent Need to Respond](#) — a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation — showing greater hardship for Virginia's Black families due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By measuring food security, housing stability, health insurance status and mental health concerns, the report details how children and families are suffering from the unprecedented disruption and economic storm set off by the global health crisis.

"Across many categories, Virginia is faring better than national averages, but we are seeing an alarming trend that's impacting the quality of life for many children of color," said Lauren Snelling, research director for Voices for Virginia's Children, home of the KIDS COUNT Data Center. "Over and over again, we see racial and ethnic disparities that's deeply embedded in this country widen because of the pandemic. The data confirms the crises families are living in and we need to take immediate action to address these issues."

The percentages of Virginia's families with children who have experienced challenges across the following indicators are listed below:

- **FOOD SECURITY:** 13% said they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat; an increase of three percent since the start of the pandemic. For Black families, the rate is nearly double at 25%.
- **HOUSING STABILITY:** 16% had slight or no confidence they would make the next rent or mortgage payment on time compared to the national average of 18%. For Virginia's Black families, the rate is 36%.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** 11% did not have health insurance compared to the national average of 12%.
- **MENTAL HEALTH:** 19% felt down, depressed or hopeless compared to the national average of 21%.

According to the *U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey*, 60% of Black families and 58% of Latino families with children in the household lost employment income since the start of the pandemic. Employment losses have disproportionately impacted Black and Latino families compared to 46% of all Virginia families.

Growing economic hardships combined with familial stressors and social injustices not only exacerbates child poverty but compromises child development. Exposure to such hardships creates harm, trauma and more instability for children.

*Kids, Families and COVID-19* examined data from weekly surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that demonstrate how families across the country are challenged to meet basic needs during this global public health crisis while managing school, work and mental health. The Foundation finds that the concurrent health and economic crises are exacerbating trends that show vulnerable families are unable to fulfill basic needs.

The report shows how urgent state and federal intervention is crucial to the health and well-being of families with children. Robust federal interventions, such as Unemployment Insurance and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, in times of crisis are not only essential but have been deeply effective.

"The time is now for the General Assembly to pass impactful policy that addresses the disparities that continue to plague underserved communities," said Tamika Quinn, chair of the Virginia Advocacy Committee for the American Heart Association, a partner of Voices. "The American Heart Association remains on the frontlines of supporting equity-focused policies such as SNAP expansion, water access in schools and lower healthcare premiums. Equity is a requirement for effective and life-changing legislation."

Voices for Virginia's Children joins the Annie E. Casey Foundation in urging policymakers to prioritize the COVID-19 response at the top of 2021 agendas to ensure that children have what they need to survive and thrive. Voices and the Foundation calls on the Virginia General Assembly to:

- ***Put racial and ethnic equity first in policymaking*** by using disaggregated data and engaging community stakeholders. This should ensure that the policymaking process is informed by the diverse perspectives of those hardest hit by the crisis and created in partnership with communities. Virginia has an opportunity to pass legislation declaring racism as a public health crisis and to begin taking the steps to address the impacts of racial trauma.
- ***Prioritize the physical and mental health of all children*** by continuing the cross-agency focus on children's health and well-being begun under the Governor Northam's Children's Cabinet. In addition, state policymakers should increase the mental health supports for children offered in early care and school settings by funding additional school counselors and providing assistance to early educators to identify mental health concerns.
- ***Help families with children achieve financial stability and bolster their well-being*** by expanding access to unemployment insurance and child care assistance to parents who are part-time and gig economy workers, low-wage workers and students. Additionally, policymakers should eliminate barriers to accessing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC).
- ***Ensure schools are better funded, more equitably funded and ready to meet the needs of students disproportionately affected by the pandemic*** by boosting school funding to protect against the economic impact of the pandemic, hold schools harmless for

enrollment losses and address disparities in technology access at home and in the classroom.

### **Release Information**

*Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and the Urgent Need to Respond* will be available December 14 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the report can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org).

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### **About Voices for Virginia's Children**

Founded in 1994, Voices for Virginia's Children is the Commonwealth's only independent, multi-issue child policy and advocacy organization. We are home to the KIDS COUNT data center for Virginia, which includes more than 200 state- and locality-level indicators on child well-being over time. Using data and independent policy research, we advocate for sound policy solutions and mobilize support to meet the needs of Virginia's children. Learn more at [vakids.org](http://vakids.org).

### **About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.