

Child poverty in US capital increases sharply

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A report by Washington, D.C. non-profit Action for Children has provided a detailed analysis of the living conditions of the District's children in the ongoing economic recession. The report, entitled *D.C. Kids Count*, is the result of a joint effort between Action for Children and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which released the nationwide *Kids Count Data Book*, surveying economic, health, and other measures of well-being for children across the country.

The report [PDF] focuses on the period from 2006 to 2010, with a baseline year set at 2000. This timeline allows one to see the erosion of well-being for the most vulnerable in the nation's capital, both before and after the onset of the financial crisis in 2008.

As of 2010, nearly 31,000, or 1 in 3 children in the District of Columbia lives in poverty, a number capable of filling "the Verizon Center—nearly twice" the report states. From 2008-2010, children with parents who lacked reliable employment increased by 7 percent, as well. The District of Columbia has a child poverty rate nearly 10 percent above the national average.

The distribution of child poverty in the district is composed in such a way that in the three most northwestern sections, child poverty and social misery in general are significantly below the national average. Ward 3, home to the city's upper middle class, clustered in areas such as Chevy Chase and Friendship Heights, possesses a median family income of over \$250,000.

In the remaining sections the levels of child poverty increasingly skyrockets, going from "moderately high," classified as between 14 and 31 percent in wards 1, 5 and 6 to extreme levels in Wards 7 and 8, where 40 and 50 percent levels of child poverty occur.

Likewise, home ownership rates in the city's most poverty-stricken areas are far below the average. In ward 8, the level of home ownership is less than 25 percent, nearly half the national average for such

measures. In comparison, wards 2-4 possessed the highest levels of home ownership at between 50 and 65 percent.

The report found that children living in homes with a high household cost burden had increased by 2 percent in the years 2005-2010. Another report by the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute found similar results, in that the housing boom had left many D.C. residents unable to afford the increased cost of housing in the district. The report stated that the local government's housing budget had been slashed from \$123 million in 2005 to less than \$60 million by 2010.

Wards 7 and 8 had the largest concentration of children either receiving government food stamps (SNAP) or had single-parent households receiving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the block grant program created during the Clinton administration.

TANF, created to end "welfare as we know it," gutted the original Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The TANF program only allows families to receive federal aid for a maximum of 60 months, and as a stipulation to receiving the funds, recipients must prove themselves to be employed by the second year of assistance or else they will be cut off.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported on the TANF program last year, a recipient of the aid money can only purchase 58 percent of what he or she could when the program was first adopted.

Since the onset of the 2008 recession, need for assistance far outpaces enrollment. Whereas programs such as food stamps have increased caseloads by nearly 45 percent since 2007, TANF caseloads have risen by only about 10 percent in the same time period. In the capital overall, TANF enrollment for families with children actually declined from 2000 to 2006-10 by 8 percent. In worst-off ward 8, enrollment fell by 9

percent, even as median income fell to \$26,660.

Other measures of well-being of the city's youth reflect the deepening social crisis. The national average for youth joblessness in the US is nearly 1 in 4. The District of Columbia rate is more than double that, according to a recent report put out by the Employment Policies Institute.

Official unemployment overall has been mired at around 10 percent for the capital. In the hardest-hit neighborhoods, official unemployment is 20 percent and a huge segment of the working age population is categorized as "not in labor force." At more than 25 percent, ward 8 has the highest unemployment rate in the country.

Though indices for education and health registered notable increases in the *Kids Count* report, this was measured in terms of high school diplomas for residents above the age of 25. In the poorer wards, indices remained substantially below the nation's average. Ward 8 saw the infant mortality rate soar to 18.1 percent, a rate on par with Armenia or Saudi Arabia, and worse than in 122 other countries.

The measurement of educational well-being does not take into consideration children most recently affected by changes in the school system, including the government's aggressive promotion of charter schools and other forms of private schooling. Washington, D.C. is considered to be the most charter-heavy school district in the US behind New Orleans.



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