

New report details explosive growth of poverty among Detroit children

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In the last ten years, child poverty in Detroit has risen 65 percent, according to a new study issued this week. The report, produced by Data Driven Detroit (D3) is entitled “State of the Detroit Child” and funded by the Skillman Foundation. A picture of unprecedented social devastation in the city of Detroit is revealed in the data.

The growth of poverty over the last decade has resulted in 57 percent of Detroit’s children living below the federally-mandated poverty line in 2011. The report presents figures for children of different age groups, showing that the youngest age group, 5 years and under, have the highest incidence of poverty at 62.7 percent.

Between 1999 and 2011, which was the scope of the report using data available from the US Census Bureau, median household income in Detroit fell by 36.8 percent when adjusted to 2011 dollars.

By dollar figures in 1999, the median household income was \$39,855, falling to \$25,193 in 2011. Considering that the US Department of Health and Human Services-established poverty guideline is \$22,350 for an annual income for a four-person family, the levels of poverty in Detroit is nothing short of catastrophic.

The D3 report makes this point about the income levels inside the city of Detroit compared to the rest of the state of Michigan: “While the economic downturn was felt across the state, with large decreases in all areas, median household income in 2011 for the state was 1.8 times that of Detroit at \$45,981 and the state’s median family income was 1.9 times higher at \$56,068.”

Figures on the specific living circumstances of children are outlined in the “Demographic Overview” section of the study. Married-couple households with children under 18 have fallen by 16.28 percent from

2000 to 2010. This group represents only 28.9 percent of households with children. Single-female households with children are 59.3 percent of the total, representing a growth of 6.8 percent over the last decade.

The percentage of overall households with children in Detroit has fallen to 34.4 percent in 2010, a 17.2 percent decline since 2000. This figure is a reflection of the fall in Detroit’s birth rate (down 16 percent from 2006-2010) and the outflow of older children from the city. Combined factors have resulted in the neediest children in the city being from the youngest (under 5 years-old) age group.

The D3 report was funded “to provide baseline information for policy-makers, educators, child advocates, and community stakeholders to guide current benchmarking and future decision-making,” according to the Skillman Foundation. The result sheds a harsh light on the results of the decades-long deindustrialization of Detroit, whatever its intentions.

From the twenty-year period from 1990 to 2010, the birth rate in Detroit has fallen 54.5 percent. The report explains this was caused “at least in part, by Detroit’s population loss during the past 20 years. Additional factors contributing to the decrease have been the general aging of the population, accelerated by young families migrating out, and the downward trend in births to teenagers.” Again, a note is made comparing it to the stagnant population of Michigan and a general trend of “outmigration.”

Over the three years between 2008 and 2010, the percentage of births to unmarried women has remained constant at 79 percent. More than one in every three Detroit births (35 percent) are to mothers who did not graduate high school and 20 percent are to teen-age mothers.

In the face of such a stark increase of social need, the

policies being carried out by federal, state and Detroit local governments have been exclusively focused on measures that exacerbate the crisis. The political establishment has implemented ever more drastic cuts in public programs, defunding needed services and making public assistance less available.

With median monthly rent increasing 13 percent from 1999 to 2011, 69.3 percent of renters in Detroit now live in unaffordable housing—defined as costing over 30 percent of household income. Nearly one quarter of Detroit households has no access to a vehicle.

The administration of Mayor Dave Bing, under the mantra of “there is no money,” has worked to destroy whatever is left of the public transportation system.



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