

Half a million children in poverty in Michigan

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Well over one-half million children in Michigan are so poor they live in families unable to cope with daily survival needs. The number of children living in poverty in the state jumped 35 percent between 2006 and 2012.

According the Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2015, released last week, one in four of all children in the state lived at or below, some drastically below, the derisory federal poverty level, set at \$18,800 for a single-parent family of three in 2013.

Detroit, meanwhile, continues to have a higher proportion of children living in poverty than any of the 50 largest US cities. Fifty-nine percent of Detroit children lived in poverty in 2012, the last year for which figures are available.

The number of children in families designated officially poor in Michigan at the end of 2012 reached the staggering number of 549,000, up from 445,000 in 2006, despite the official declarations of the end of the recession.

As the Kids Count report notes, a quarter of a million families in Michigan live in extreme poverty, below half the poverty level, at \$9,085 in annual income for a family of three. A large portion of those families have annual incomes half even that, effectively destitute at less than \$4,500 a year.

Not only has the total number of children in poverty and the overall poverty rate grown dramatically since 2006, but so also has extreme poverty in families with children. It is estimated 125,000 children live in families in extreme poverty, with an annual income below one-half the official poverty level.

Roughly 700,000 children in the state benefited from access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, commonly know as food stamps, for their basic nutrition in 2013—up from about 500,000 in 2006. The number of young children in families receiving SNAP benefits climbed by 40 percent.

The report zeros in on SNAP use in Wayne, Genesee and Saginaw counties, once home to hundreds of thousands of auto workers. The percentage of young children on food stamps is 40 percent or more in these counties, home to cities like Detroit, Flint and Saginaw.

Another nutrition program has a seen dramatically rising participation rate in Michigan. There has been a 34 percent increase in children receiving free and reduced price lunch at school, a further measure of the growing need. In Detroit 90 percent of children get lunch in the program.

The dramatic decline in support for children in the state is evident in the plummeting number of families collecting some amount of cash assistance, as noted in the Kids Count report. Laws to strictly enforce time limits, first imposed under Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm in 2007, have slashed welfare payments.

The erosion of the individual welfare grant, like the erosion of the minimum wage and the decline of auto workers pay, has the monthly grant down to just \$390 for a single parent with one child. A woman who gets laid off and exhausts her unemployment can end up trying to support her family at one fourth the amount the government designates as necessary for basic survival in modern society.



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