

Half a million California children are homeless

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Last November the National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research (NCFH) released a report exposing that 2.5 million children are homeless in America.

The report analyzes each state in four different areas: the extent of child homelessness, child wellbeing, the risk for children becoming homeless, and the policy efforts undertaken to address homelessness. Child homelessness is endemic in the US. Even in Minnesota, the state scoring best overall, there are still about 2 percent of children homeless.

California, the wealthiest state in the country, home to over 100 billionaires, accounts for over 500,000 of these children, or about one in 20 children in the state. It ranked as the third worst in the extent of homelessness, the second worst in policy, and in the lower half of the US in terms of risk and wellbeing, making it the third worst US state for child homelessness overall.

Under the definition of homelessness used by NCFH, homeless children typically have at least some intermittent shelter through most of the year, but are transitory and often live out of cars, motels or abandoned buildings, or double-up with family members or friends.

For these children, homelessness affects every aspect of their lives. In addition to the direct economic issues they face throughout their childhood, such as hunger and malnutrition, homeless children experience developmental delays, have trouble in school, and are more prone to anxiety and aggression.

Patricia Navarro, an enrollment specialist with the Colton Joint Unified School District, told the Los Angeles Daily News: “We’re worried about bringing up test scores and bringing up grades when these kids are worrying about their next meal or where they’re

going to stay the next day.”

In San Bernardino County in particular, just under 10 percent of public school students are homeless. The rest of the students are not much better off. In the city of San Bernardino, one of the largest municipalities in the US currently undergoing bankruptcy proceedings, things are even worse. According to Kennon Mitchell, assistant superintendent for San Bernardino City Unified School District, interviewed by NPR, “Close to 97 percent of our students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, which means that they’re below the poverty line.”

In San Bernardino, sometimes called the “meth capital of the world,” children are staying in motels that host the transitory homeless are frequently exposed to drugs and violence. As reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, one boy wrote down his feelings that he kept in his backpack: “The only thing I haven’t lost yet is my life, but I hope I’ll lose it soon cause I can’t take it anymore.” He was shortly thereafter taken away by child services. About 33,000 children are homeless in San Bernardino.

Despite the rampant poverty, bourgeois economists have praised the county as being a model for growth. As the WSWs noted, this growth is based on the most exploitative working conditions. Corporate profits have risen, but wages have stagnated, and workloads have increased. The WSWs interviewed a warehouse worker who said, “We have people working here 20 years, still moving boxes and making minimum wage with no benefits.”

What’s more is that while income is low, rent is high. From an April report of the California Housing Partnership Corporation (CHPC), the poorest quarter of California households (those not themselves homeless) spend an average 67 percent of their income on housing

needs, most of which is rent. For rent to be considered affordable in Los Angeles—or less than 35 percent of income—a family must make over \$100,000 annually, or about \$49 an hour in a full-time job. There is a shortfall of about 1.5 million affordable homes in the state.

With the chronic unemployment and underemployment that's been a feature of the economy since the 2008 crash, it is very easy for a family under even mild duress to fall into homelessness. The NCFH report notes: "Families who become homeless tend to be living in very precarious economic circumstances prior to their homelessness. A single event such as the loss of a job, an illness, injury, a large household bill, loss of a car or day care can topple a vulnerable family into homelessness."

Early last year, the CHPC released a similar report in which it found a shortfall of only 1 million affordable homes. That this shortfall increased by 500,000 homes in one year is the result of the policy of the administration of Governor Jerry Brown. Brown has consistently been on the side of corporate land developers who want to build more profitable, higher income homes, vetoing a 2013 bill that would have put requirements on developers to build at least some low-income housing projects.

More broadly, the gutting of federal programs for food stamps and the health care overhaul by the Obama administration have hacked away at what little is left of a social safety net, placing more of the burden on the backs of working people. The result of these policies has been the highest rate of child homelessness since the Great Depression. As the global economic crisis intensifies, the capitalist politicians will more and more seek to force the working class to pay for a crisis that it did not create. The impoverishment and homelessness of a large number of children in the US is a further symptom of this process.



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