

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND

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The State of America's Children 2004: A Continuing Portrait of Inequality Fifty Years After Brown versus Board of Education

[WASHINGTON, DC] – This week the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) released *The State of America's Children 2004*, which provides a comprehensive examination of how children are faring in our country. The book paints a troubling picture – based on the most recent statistical data and analyses – of an unacceptably high number of children who are still being left behind.

One in six children in the United States continues to live in poverty. One in eight – 9.3 million – children have no health insurance. Three out of five children under six are cared for by someone other than their parents on a regular basis. Only 31 percent of fourth graders read at or above grade level. An estimated three million children were reported as suspected victims of child abuse and neglect. Almost one in ten teens ages 16 to 19 is a school dropout. Eight children and teens die from gunfire in the U.S. each day – one child every three hours.

“Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education* and 40 years after President Johnson declared a War on Poverty, many minority and lower-income children still lack a fair chance to live, learn, thrive and contribute in America,” said Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of CDF. “The great unfinished business of our nation in this first decade of the 21st century is to open wide the doors of equal education and economic opportunity to every child in America. It's time to build a powerful 21st century movement to emancipate our children from racial injustice and poverty. We must summon the moral, political, and financial courage to make sure that we truly leave no child behind.”

The State of America's Children 2004 features the most recent data available on our nation's children and reviews developments in family income and child poverty, hunger and food assistance, child health, child care, Head Start and school-age care, education, children and families in crisis, and juvenile justice and youth development. Graphs and charts along with the latest and most compelling statistics clarify the status of children in several key areas:

Family Income

Three out of four poor children live in families where someone worked and one in three poor children lives with a full-time year-round worker. More than 5.1 million children live in extremely low-income households spending at least half of their income on housing.

Twenty-two million adults and 13 million children live in households suffering from hunger or “food insecurity without hunger.”

The richest one-fifth of households made 10.7 times as much in median income as the poorest one-fifth, the widest gap on record from the U.S. Census Bureau. Child Health

9.3 million children lack health insurance; yet six million of these uninsured children are eligible for Medicaid or the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) under current law.

Infants born to Black mothers are more than twice as likely to die before their first birthday as infants born to White mothers.

The number of overweight children has more than tripled since 1980. Almost nine million young people are overweight – over 15 percent of children and adolescents under age 19.

Child Care, Head Start, and School-Age Care

Sixty-four percent of mothers with children under six and 78 percent of mothers with children ages six to 17 work outside the home.

In 48 states, the cost of center-based child care for a four-year-old is greater than tuition at a four-year public college.

The number of children participating in Head Start has more than doubled during the past three decades, but currently the program only serves three out of five three- and four-year-olds.

Education

Seven out of ten fourth graders cannot read or do math at grade level.

Ninety percent of the nation’s children attend public schools. Children in the poorest families are six times as likely as children in more affluent families to drop out of high school.

Three-quarters of the nation's public schools are in need of repairs, renovations, and modernization. The average school building is more than 40 years old. Yet states spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner as per public school pupil.

Children and Families in Crisis

Three million children in a year are reported abused or neglected and referred for investigation or assessment; close to 900,000 of them are confirmed as victims of child maltreatment.

Child abuse and domestic violence co-occur in an estimated 30 to 60 percent of the families where there is some form of family violence.

The 51,000 children adopted from foster care in 2002 is almost double the number adopted in 1995, but more than 126,000 children in foster care continue to wait for permanent families.

Juvenile Justice and Youth Development

The national crime rate has dropped nearly 25 percent since 1993, but more than one-quarter of violent crime victims known to police in the U.S. are juveniles. Youths ages 16 to 19 currently experience overall violence, including rape and general assault, at higher rates than people in all other age categories.

Two-thirds of youths in the juvenile justice system have one or more diagnosable mental health disorders. Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population: The arrest rate for females under age 18 increased more than 14 percent between 1993 and 2002, while the rate for males under age 18 decreased.

More than six million school-age children are left alone after school without supervision. The average child watches 28 hours of television a week and by age 18 will have seen more than 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 simulated murders depicted on the TV screen.

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