

# Child poverty is down in Kentucky; education and health lag

BY SARAH LADD  
KENTUCKY LANTERN

Fewer Kentucky children were living in poverty in 2024 than 2019, right before the COVID-19 pandemic, but nearly one in five kids still lack the resources they need to thrive.

That's according to the latest Kids Count Data Book, released Monday by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The annual report looks at indicators of wellbeing including education, health, economic success and community and family measures.

The data in the 2026 report primarily compares 2019 and 2024. The foundation gave each state a score between 0 and 1,000. Kentucky received a score of 498, which is worse than the national score of 547 but better than 2019, when it received a 465.

Kentucky is still the 36th state in the nation when it comes to child welfare, making it one of the worst places to be a child.

The commonwealth's neighbors are a mixed bag. Kentucky is doing better by its children than West Virginia and Tennessee but worse than Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

Shannon Moody, the incoming executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, said fewer "kids living in homes that are in poverty is always a great thing for Kentucky."

"What we're continuing to keep an eye on is how families are being impacted now, right now, with affordability of basic needs: Groceries, gas, housing and childcare continue to be something that we'll be watching," she said. "I'm really look-



Photo provided  
**SHANNON MOODY.**

ing forward to seeing what continues to arise when it comes to that, whether or not we'll see things trend back downward."

The data, though it was just released, is still two years old, and much has changed. In 2025, Congress cut Medicaid spending over 10 years by \$880 billion as part of the sweeping One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

That same budget package made recent foster care youth, among others, no longer exempt from work requirements to receive food benefits for themselves and their families through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Nearly half of the people who receive SNAP assistance in Kentucky are under the age of 18.

"It's 2024 data. We did not begin to see the impacts of the pandemic funding being reduced — We're seeing that now in our biennial budget," Moody said. "I'm glad to see in 2024 less kids were living in homes in poverty, and we need to continue being vigilant about how we are supporting kids and families ... whether it's safety net programs or ensuring that there is

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HEALTH	UNITED STATES			KENTUCKY		
	2019	2024	TREND	2019	2024	TREND
<b>Low birth-weight babies</b> US 308,966   KY 4,640	8.3%	8.5%	↑ WORSE	8.7%	8.8%	↑ WORSE
<b>Children without health insurance</b> US 4,648,000   KY 54,000	6%	6%	STABLE	4%	5%	↑ WORSE
<b>Child and teen deaths per 100,000</b> US 21,189   KY 335	25	27	↑ WORSE	29	31	↑ WORSE
<b>Children and teens (ages 10 to 17) who are overweight or obese</b> US N.A.   KY N.A.	31%	30%	↓ BETTER	37%	33%	↓ BETTER

This graphic shows health rankings for Kentucky's children.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING	UNITED STATES			KENTUCKY		
	2019	2024	TREND	2019	2024	TREND
<b>Children in poverty</b> US 11,117,000   KY 192,000	17%	15%	↓ BETTER	22%	19%	↓ BETTER
<b>Children whose parents lack secure employment</b> US 18,420,000   KY 287,000	26%	25%	↓ BETTER	31%	28%	↓ BETTER
<b>Children living in households with a high housing cost burden</b> US 22,385,000   KY 232,000	30%	31%	↑ WORSE	23%	23%	STABLE
<b>Teens not in school and not working</b> US 1,218,000   KY 20,000	6%	7%	↑ WORSE	8%	8%	STABLE

This graphic shows how Kentucky children are faring economically.

EDUCATION	UNITED STATES			KENTUCKY		
	2019	2024	TREND	2019	2024	TREND
<b>Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school</b> US 4,277,000   KY 70,000	52%	54%	↑ WORSE	59%	63%	↑ WORSE
<b>Fourth graders not proficient in reading</b> US N.A.   KY N.A.	66%	70%	↑ WORSE	65%	67%	↑ WORSE
<b>Eighth graders not proficient in math</b> US N.A.   KY N.A.	67%	73%	↑ WORSE	71%	76%	↑ WORSE
<b>High school students not graduating on time</b> US N.A.   KY N.A.	14%	13%	↓ BETTER	9%	8%	↓ BETTER

This graphic shows how Kentucky children are faring in education.

## BEVIN

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13, culminating in his abandonment at age 17 at the Atlantis Leadership Academy, a brutally violent youth facility in Jamaica that was shut down by child welfare authorities in 2024.

"The Bevins paid for pain, not protection," Post's affidavit said. "Jonah's harm stemmed from the decisions of those responsible for his well-being, not his own actions."

Youths at the facility were routinely beaten, deprived of food, denied medical care, threatened and got little to no education, Post's affidavit said.

She also said the Bevins refused to try to arrange Jonah's return to the United States and as a result, he was placed in Jamaica's foster care system for a time.

Post said she, as a child advocate, spent three weeks in Jamaica in 2024 working on behalf of the youths removed from the facility, including Jonah, and said the Bevins were only parents who did not "engage" with the U.S. embassy or Jamaican child welfare authorities to assist in his care and return to the United States.

In fact, she alleged, Matt Bevin at one point sought to have the

closed facility reopened and for Jonah to returned to it.

### BEVINS' SON SEEKING SUPPORT TO FUND EDUCATION

The case attracted international media attention after hotel heiress and celebrity Paris Hilton — an advocate for children in the so-called "troubled teen" industry — flew to Jamaica to aid the youths.

Jonah eventually returned to the United States for a placement she helped arrange with the aid of the U.S. State Department, Post said.

Matt Bevin in his statement alleged he and his ex-wife sought to keep the case private to protect Jonah, who he said had experienced problems as a teen with behavioral health, substance abuse and a criminal charge — apparently referring to a charge stemming from an altercation with his father.

Jonah, in a statement Friday provided by his lawyers, said he wasn't "surprised that my parents are again now trying to put this on me."

"I have been very open and public about my experience growing

up in harmful and abusive environments. I want to make my story public so it never happens to another kid."

His lawyers said Jonah, now 19, is living in another state with little income or support. They have said Jonah, who has been diagnosed with learning disabilities, lacks a valid high school diploma and has difficulty finding employment.

Their lawsuit intervening in his parents' divorce case seeks support and help for Jonah in completing an education.

The Bevins' divorce became final last year but the case is pending over a final, financial settlement and Jonah's request for aid.

Bevin, in Friday's statement, also renewed his criticism of the judge in the case, saying Johnson's rulings "make a mockery of Kentucky and our court system" and that she "is using her elected platform for partisan purposes."

He made similar claims earlier this year in a filing with the Kentucky Supreme Court attempting to have Johnson removed from his

case for bias and treating him like a "political pinata."

The high court last month found no basis for those claims and declined to remove Johnson from the case, sending it back to her for further action.

Johnson, at the May 29 hearing, told Bevin she treated him no differently from any other person in court.

"I treat you as I would every other litigant that appears in this courtroom," she said. "I would be damaging trust in the court system if I gave you a pass."

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2 lb.	4 lb.	New York Strip Steaks
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6 lb.	12 lb.	Center Cut Pork Chops
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11 lb.	22 lb.	First Cut Pork Chops
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8 lb.	16 lb.	Pork Steak or Pork Roast
8 lb.	16 lb.	Pork Cutlets or Pork Patties
10 lb.	20 lb.	Country Style Ribs
4 lb.	8 lb.	Platter Sliced Bacon
7.5 lb.	15 lb.	Pork Sausage
2.5 lb.	5 lb.	Minute Steaks
10 lb.	20 lb.	Whole Fryers or 8-pc Cut-Up Fryers
20 lb.	40 lb.	Chicken Leg Quarters (4 Pk)
5 lb.	10 lb.	Breaded Chicken Strips (5 Lb. PK)
5 lb.	10 lb.	Breaded Chicken Patties
5 lb.	10 lb.	Ozark Pride Deli Sliced Ham (1 Lb. Pk.)

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