



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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Time to Get Serious About Solving Child Poverty in Wisconsin New Report Outlines Severity and Impact, Recommends Strategic Approaches

Child poverty has grown sharply in Wisconsin in recent years. About one in five Wisconsin children—over a quarter of a million total—live below the poverty line. This disturbing trend is contributing to a host of problems that affect everyone in the state – families living in poverty are not the only ones impacted, entire communities are affected as well. Unfortunately, the problem of worsening poverty is invisible to many people who are not experiencing it, including many of those positioned to fight poverty on a systemic level. A new report from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) examines the depth and breadth of child poverty in Wisconsin, outlines the impact it has on our children and our communities, and explores strategies to address it.

“It is simply unacceptable that a quarter of a million Wisconsin children, including half of our African-American children, live in poverty,” said WCCF Executive Director Ken Taylor. “The consequence of widespread poverty is negatively impacting far too many neighborhoods and communities in Wisconsin. If we fail to get a handle on it now, we will be failing an entire generation.”

Families clearly play a primary role. But an important part of the problem, according to the report, is a lack of political will to make the kinds of sustained public investments that are likely to help. One reason for this is the mistaken belief that Wisconsin’s poverty problem is a Milwaukee problem, when in fact over 2/3 of Wisconsin’s poor children live outside of Milwaukee, many of them in suburban and rural communities all across the state. The impact of growing up poor touches virtually every indicator of a child’s well-being, including health, education achievement, contact with the criminal justice system, and future economic stability.

“Every aspect of growing up poor is interconnected,” Taylor notes. “Poverty affects a child’s physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and economic well-being, and all of those aspects of well-being constantly affect each other.”

Moreover, according to Taylor, these impacts touch every part of a community. “The school system, the health system, and businesses operating in high poverty areas are all going to feel the impact,” he said. “We’re all economically connected. When poverty is high, we all pay the price.”

The report goes on to recommend several broad strategies to combat poverty and its associated problems in Wisconsin. They include: implementing two-generation strategies that support under-resources parents while intensifying investments in their children; addressing poverty on the community and neighborhood levels; defining policies that narrow critical race- and ethnicity-based gaps; applying

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approaches that have worked well in other places; and improved communication and collaboration among those working on poverty issues. Areas to focus on include early education, employment and training, health care, affordable housing, income supports, and place-based initiatives.

“We all do better when we all do better. That’s not just a hollow slogan,” Taylor said. “The future of our state and our communities depends on our success in reducing poverty. We are all interdependent, and we are all responsible for the health of our communities.”

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