

Washington state has fourth lowest child poverty rate in U.S.

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Washington State now has the fourth lowest child poverty rate in the nation, tied with Hawaii. Last year, Washington ranked 21st in the U.S.

The new 2006 data show that gains begun in 2005 have steadily increased, say researchers at the West Coast Poverty Center, located at the University of Washington. Analyzing data released by the U.S. Census Bureau today, the researchers said that in 2005, Washington's child poverty rate reached a five-year high, 16.6 percent. By comparison, however, the national rate was 17.6 percent.

Increases in child poverty in Washington accompanied falling employment rates and stagnant incomes from 2000 to 2004. Then in 2005, as Washington employment and median income began to recover, child poverty rates began to decline. By 2006, Census Bureau data showed that child poverty in Washington had further declined. The bureau lists 2006 child poverty rate in Washington as 10.5 percent, or 159,000 children. By comparison, the national rate for 2006 was 17.4 percent.

Historically, children have been the poorest age group in the United States, with poverty rates frequently almost double those for adults, said Robert Plotnick, spokesman for the Center. In 2006, the rate of childhood poverty in Washington was 140% of the rate for adults, improving from a high of 146% last year but still not quite down to the 2000 level of 126%.

The Census Bureau releases poverty, income, and health insurance statistics annually. The federal poverty line varies depending on family size and makeup. In 2006, the poverty line for a family of four with two children was \$20,444; for a single individual, it was \$10,488.

The West Coast Poverty Center is a federally funded hub for research and education on causes, consequences, and effective policy responses to poverty in west coast states.

The Center averaged the Census data over three years to improve precision of measurements. (Because of relatively small sample sizes, single-year estimates at the state level are too imprecise to draw strong conclusions.)

Source: University of Washington

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