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New Poverty Measure Shows Safety Net Works for Utah Children

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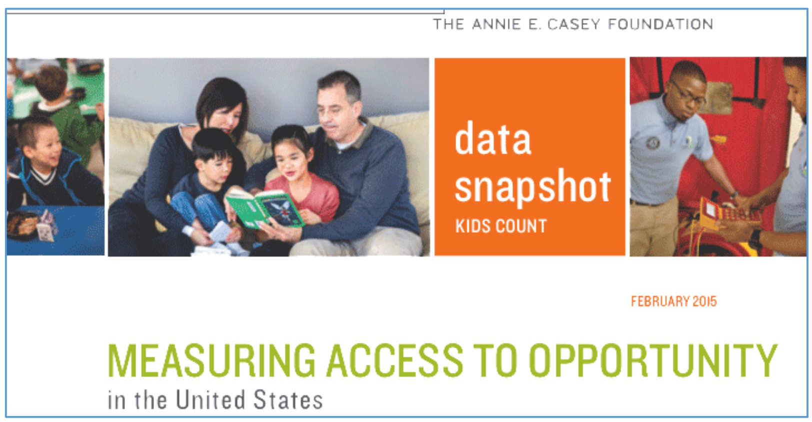
An additional 98,000 Utah kids would live in poverty if not for government programs



Salt Lake City—A new KIDS COUNT® Data Snapshot by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States,* finds that the **rate of child poverty in Utah would double, from 11% to 22%, if it weren't for social programs such as food stamps, WIC, school lunches, child tax credits and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).** The report analyzes the first three-year data set of the new Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) aggregating U.S. Census Bureau data from 2011-2013.

"The new poverty data show that the safety net works," said Terry Haven, Interim Director for Voices for Utah Children. "If policy makers were to eliminate the safety net, an additional 98,000 Utah children would live in poverty."

The new SPM is different than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) that is used to determine eligibility for government programs. Unlike the FPL, the SPM takes into account rising costs and other changes that affect family budgets, geographic differences in cost of living, and the effect of safety net programs and tax policies on families. According to the FPL, 15% of Utah children were in poverty during the same time period. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2013 American Community Survey)

"The official poverty measure does not provide the accurate information policymakers need to measure the success of anti-poverty programs – nationally and at the state-level," said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Relying on this tool alone prevents policymakers from gauging the effectiveness of government programs aimed at reducing child poverty. Given that child poverty costs our society an estimated $500 billion a year in lost productivity and increased spending on health care and the criminal justice system, the SPM is an important tool that should be used to assess state-level progress in fighting poverty."

Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States follows the Casey Foundation's 2014 report, *Creating Opportunities for Families: A Two-Generation Approach*, which outlined additional recommendations for helping families raise themselves out of poverty that include:

- Expanding access to high-quality early education;
- Changing tax credit policies to help families keep more of what they earn;
- Expanding and streamlining food and housing subsidies; and
- Developing approaches that link programs for kids – like Head Start – with programs for their parents, such as education and job training.

Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States is available at www.aecf.org.