

Report Urges Funding for N.M. Kids

Many Are Poor, Lack Insurance

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New Mexico Voices for Children, a nonprofit dedicated to issues such as child poverty and family health, on Thursday released its annual state Kids Count report, which shows that many children are living below poverty and lacking health insurance.

The report also emphasized the need for legislators to continue funding early childhood education programs.



"If the state cannot make its children the highest priority, New Mexico will continue to have a weak economic base and low quality of life," the report said.

The report showed:

- Children 17 and younger living in poverty in 2008: 24.1 percent.
- Births to single mothers in 2007: 51.8 percent.
- People 19 and younger without health insurance in 2006: 11.9 percent.

Christine Hollis, N.M. Voices for Children Kids Count director, said as government programs are being cut to save money, legislators should spare programs for children.

"Instead of hurting families who are struggling even more right now, we need supportive policies for early childhood education and development, a continuum of quality K-12 education, health care coverage and family supports," Hollis said.

The report noted that while Forbes magazine in 2009 ranked New Mexico as the 27th best state in which to do business, the state came in 48th when the magazine

looked at quality of life, which factored in things like education, health, crime, cost of living and poverty rates.

The U.S. Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey showed that 17.1 percent of New Mexicans lived below the federal poverty line, one of the highest rates in the nation.

The state Kids Count report follows a national Kids Count report, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The national report, issued last summer, said New Mexico rose in its ranking, from No. 48 to No. 43, thanks to a decrease in the teen dropout and infant mortality rates.