

## Letters to the Editor

### Invest in Solving Child Poverty

I WAS DISAPPOINTED to see the headline— "Fewer N.M. Kids Living in Poverty"— in the Journal above the Associated Press article on the new Kids Count data book, as it is misleading.

As the article accurately states, "The percentage of New Mexico children living in poverty remained unchanged." The state's rank for child poverty did move up a notch from 48th in 2006 to 47th this year, but we can't assume that translates to fewer children living in poverty. It's much more likely that we simply got bumped up because child poverty got worse elsewhere.

As with any data, of course, one gets the best picture from looking at long-term trends. New Mexico has ranked near the bottom for more than a decade.

While some very good legislation was passed in the 2007 session that will help low-income families, it will take much more to substantially improve the lives of our state's most vulnerable children. Poverty is a web of multiple issues that feed into one another. Low-wage work is one layer in the web. Low-wage work that doesn't provide health insurance adds another layer. The lack of paid sick leave adds yet another. It's no wonder poverty feels like a trap.

This web effect is one of the reasons that poverty is cyclic— children who grow up in poverty generally lack more than one critical support system. This is also why child poverty cannot be addressed with a patch here and a bandage there. The state must take a unified approach that simultaneously tackles each layer of the web— wages, health care, education, housing, child care, mental health.

A comprehensive approach to addressing child poverty must be looked at as a social and economic investment. The more children we lift out of poverty today the more productive, tax-paying adults we have tomorrow. Then we all live in a safer society because fewer people are so disenfranchised that they have nothing to lose.

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