

CARSEY INSTITUTE

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO SUPPORT RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 29, 2006

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EDITORS NOTE: [Download Table with Child Poverty in Non-Metro Areas by State](#)

Rural Children Continue to Live in Poverty

U.S. Census Bureau Finds that a Higher Percent of Rural Kids Live in Poverty Today than Five Years Ago

DURHAM, N.H. – In forty-one states, a higher percentage of rural children live in poverty today than they did five years ago, the Carsey Institute finds from new data released by the U.S. Census Bureau today. While the nationwide poverty rate remained stagnant, the situation became worse throughout rural, non-metro America.

“Many of the headlines are saying that poverty levels have not increased, but unfortunately trends are worse for rural children,” Cynthia M. Duncan, Director of the Carsey Institute, said. “Clearly many rural families, especially in the South, are struggling to support their families and rural children are paying the price, growing up in poverty with bleak futures. Rigorous evaluations of programs to help the poor have shown investments can pay off. We need to invest in rural children, not leave them behind. The fact that almost 40 percent of children in rural Mississippi are living in poverty is a terrible indictment of our social policies.”

The Census Bureau’s release of the 2005 American Community Survey, which provides data for metro and non-metro regions, provided the first opportunity to examine the well-being of America’s children on a state by state basis since the 2000 Census. The child poverty rate is the most widely used indicator of child well-being since poverty is closely linked to undesirable outcomes in health, education, emotional welfare, and delinquency. Changes in child poverty signal important changes in children’s quality of life and future outcomes.

“The new figures released by the Census Bureau today indicate that children growing up in rural America continue to have higher poverty rates than their counterparts in urban America,” William O’Hare, Visiting Senior Fellow at the Carsey Institute said. “While a slight economic recovery may be seen in metropolitan areas, it is clearly not reaching rural Americans and rural children.”

Key findings include:

- Rural child poverty rates increased between 2000 and 2005 in 41 states (data were not available in four states).
- The nationwide rural/non-metro child poverty rate was 22.5 percent compared to the total nationwide child poverty rate of 18.5 percent in 2005, according to the ACS.
- Five states experienced increases of five percentage points or more in the rural child poverty rate between 2000 and 2005. The state with the biggest percentage point increase in child poverty between 2000 and 2005 was Maine (+ 7.4 percentage points), followed by North Carolina (+ 6.7 percentage points), Mississippi (+ 6.1 percentage points), Ohio (+ 5.6 percentage points) and Indiana (+5.4 percentage points).
- Only six states showed a decrease in the rural child poverty rate, led by Wyoming with a 4.2 percentage point decrease.
- The rural child poverty rate ranges from a low of just over six percent in Connecticut to a high of nearly 37 percent in Mississippi.
- Five states (Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico, Arizona, and Alabama) all had rural child poverty rates above 30 percent in 2005, which reflects the pervasive child poverty in the rural South.

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The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire conducts research and analysis into the challenges facing rural families and communities in New Hampshire, New England, and the nation. The Carsey Institute sponsors independent, interdisciplinary research that documents trends and conditions in rural America, providing valuable information and analysis to policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the general public. Through this work, the Carsey Institute contributes to public dialogue on policies that encourage social mobility and sustain healthy, equitable communities and strengthens nonprofits working to improve family and community well-being.

The Carsey Institute was established in May 2002 from a generous gift from alumna and noted television producer Marcy Carsey.