



## 2014 Data Indicate That Four in Ten Children Live in Low-Income Families

### Half of These Are in Poor Families and Nearly Half of Those in Deeply Poor Families

Jessica A. Carson, Andrew Schaefer, and Marybeth J. Mattingly

In September 2015, the Census Bureau released 2014 poverty data from the American Community Survey (ACS), the only regular source for reliably estimating child poverty in geographic areas below the state level using the official poverty measure. In this brief, we use ACS data to explore child poverty rates across the United States by region, state, and place type (rural, suburban, and city). We also examine data on children who are deeply poor (those in families with incomes below half of the poverty line), as well as low-income children (those in families with incomes less than twice the poverty line). We find that while child poverty declined nationwide between 2013 and 2014, that drop was not felt uniformly across the country: several states saw declines, a few states saw increases, and others saw no change at all. We also found substantial differences in the magnitude of change across rural places, suburbs, and cities.

### Child Poverty Rates Vary by State

While child poverty declined overall, rates still vary tremendously across states, regions, and place types (see Table 1). Nationwide, 21.7 percent of children lived in poor families in 2014 (that is, with incomes below \$19,073 for a single parent with two children),<sup>1</sup> down 0.6 percentage point since 2013. Regionally, the Northeast retains the lowest child poverty rate, at 19.0 percent, while the highest rates continue to be found in cities (28.5 percent), followed by rural places (25.2 percent), and suburbs (16.8 percent). While child poverty declined in all place types between 2013 and 2014, declines across regions were not as consistent: the Northeast's child

#### KEY FINDINGS

44.1%

In 2014, more than four in ten children (44.1 percent) lived in low-income families, defined as families with incomes below 200 percent of the official poverty line.

1/5

More than one-fifth of children (21.7 percent) were poor, that is, lived below the poverty line, and nearly one-tenth (9.6 percent) lived in deep poverty, defined as having incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line.



The share of children living in deeply poor, poor, and low-income homes declined between 2013 and 2014.



The share of children living in low-income families did not rise in any state between 2013 and 2014, but the share of children living in poor families rose in four states that traditionally have low child poverty rates (Alaska, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and North Dakota). The share of children living in deep poverty rose in just two states: North Dakota and Maine.



In all regions and place types (rural, suburban and city), the share of poor and low-income children was higher in 2014 than at the official end of the Great Recession in 2009. In twenty states, child poverty rates were similar to post-recession levels, and in two states (Colorado and Montana), child poverty was lower than in 2009.



In every state the poverty rate remained at or above where it stood in 2007, before the start of the Great Recession.

**TABLE 1. PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY, BY STATE AND PLACE TYPE, 2014, OFFICIAL POVERTY MEASURE**

	ALL PLACES				RURAL				SUBURBAN				CITY			
	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009
United States	21.7	0.1	<b>-0.6</b>	<b>1.7</b>	25.2	0.3	<b>-1.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>	16.8	0.1	<b>-0.4</b>	<b>2.0</b>	28.5	0.2	<b>-0.7</b>	<b>2.1</b>
Northeast	19.0	0.2	-0.3	<b>2.4</b>	19.7	0.7	-0.2	<b>2.2</b>	12.6	0.3	-0.1	<b>1.9</b>	32.3	0.5	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>4.1</b>
Midwest	20.1	0.2	<b>-0.4</b>	<b>0.8</b>	20.7	0.4	<b>-0.7</b>	0.4	14.0	0.3	-0.2	<b>1.0</b>	30.9	0.5	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>
South	24.0	0.2	<b>-0.6</b>	<b>1.5</b>	30.4	0.4	<b>-1.6</b>	<b>1.2</b>	19.0	0.2	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>2.1</b>	29.6	0.4	-0.2	<b>1.9</b>
West	21.2	0.2	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>2.1</b>	22.8	0.7	-0.9	<b>1.6</b>	18.9	0.3	<b>-0.7</b>	<b>2.5</b>	23.8	0.4	<b>-1.1</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Alabama	27.7	0.9	0.5	<b>3.0</b>	34.6	2.0	1.9	<b>3.3</b>	20.9	1.3	-1.1	<b>3.8</b>	34.2	1.9	2.2	<b>3.8</b>
Alaska	15.8	1.6	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.0</b>	19.0	1.7	-1.7	<b>2.5</b>	9.9	2.2	0.2	-0.2	16.7	3.1	<b>9.6</b>	<b>5.1</b>
Arizona	25.6	0.7	-0.9	<b>2.3</b>	34.2	2.4	<b>-3.7</b>	0.4	20.0	1.1	-1.6	<b>3.0</b>	30.0	1.1	0.2	<b>2.7</b>
Arkansas	26.4	1.1	<b>-2.6</b>	-0.7	29.8	1.8	<b>-3.6</b>	-0.6	20.3	1.8	-1.7	-1.3	29.3	2.4	-2.1	0.3
California	22.7	0.3	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>2.8</b>	21.0	2.0	-2.4	0.8	21.5	0.4	-0.2	<b>3.5</b>	24.2	0.4	<b>-1.4</b>	<b>2.3</b>
Colorado	15.4	0.7	<b>-1.4</b>	<b>-1.9</b>	19.1	2.2	-1.5	-0.5	11.1	1.0	-0.5	-1.0	19.9	1.2	<b>-2.5</b>	<b>-3.9</b>
Connecticut	14.9	0.9	0.3	<b>2.8</b>	7.5	2.7	-0.4	-2.3	10.4	1.0	0.0	<b>2.0</b>	26.2	2.2	1.0	<b>4.9</b>
Delaware	17.7	1.7	-0.3	1.2			N/A		15.4	1.8	-0.2	1.6	35.3	6.6	0.3	4.6
District of Columbia	26.0	3.0	-1.2	-3.4			N/A				N/A		26.0	3.0	-1.2	-3.4
Florida	23.8	0.5	-0.7	<b>2.5</b>	33.3	2.7	-1.1	<b>3.7</b>	21.9	0.6	-0.4	<b>2.6</b>	27.9	1.1	<b>-1.6</b>	<b>2.8</b>
Georgia	26.3	0.7	-0.2	<b>4.0</b>	33.4	1.4	-1.4	<b>2.1</b>	22.2	0.8	0.3	<b>4.5</b>	35.0	1.7	-1.3	<b>3.0</b>
Hawaii	14.7	1.3	1.4	0.9	20.3	3.9	-1.1	<b>5.9</b>	12.1	1.6	1.3	-2.3	16.7	2.8	3.8	<b>5.0</b>
Idaho	18.8	1.3	-0.3	0.7	20.6	2.1	1.5	1.7	17.7	2.0	-2.8	2.6	18.7	2.9	2.1	-2.6
Illinois	20.2	0.5	-0.5	<b>1.3</b>	20.5	1.4	-1.3	<b>-2.2</b>	15.1	0.6	-0.5	<b>2.1</b>	29.6	1.0	-0.2	<b>2.4</b>
Indiana	21.5	0.7	-0.7	<b>1.6</b>	19.5	1.2	<b>-1.8</b>	-1.1	14.7	0.9	-0.9	<b>1.9</b>	32.5	1.4	0.0	2.0
Iowa	15.3	0.8	-0.9	-0.4	16.0	1.1	-1.3	0.4	8.6	1.3	0.7	-0.2	21.4	1.9	-2.1	-1.4
Kansas	17.7	0.9	-0.9	0.1	19.9	1.5	-0.7	0.6	12.7	1.4	1.7	1.6	20.9	1.8	<b>-3.9</b>	-2.7
Kentucky	26.2	0.8	0.9	0.6	31.3	1.4	0.5	-0.6	19.4	1.4	-0.1	0.7	27.5	1.9	<b>3.2</b>	2.5
Louisiana	27.9	0.9	0.1	<b>3.7</b>	35.1	2.1	0.0	<b>5.4</b>	22.0	1.2	-0.6	<b>3.2</b>	35.5	1.7	1.9	<b>7.8</b>
Maine	19.1	1.5	1.4	2.0	21.4	2.1	1.7	1.8	13.7	2.1	0.3	2.2	31.0	5.5	3.8	4.5
Maryland	13.0	0.6	-0.6	<b>1.4</b>	22.0	3.8	-1.7	<b>7.1</b>	10.1	0.7	-0.5	<b>1.3</b>	23.2	1.8	-0.8	-0.2
Massachusetts	15.2	0.7	<b>-1.2</b>	<b>2.0</b>	13.9	5.2	-4.6	N/A	11.7	0.7	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>	29.8	1.9	-0.7	<b>5.7</b>
Michigan	22.6	0.5	<b>-1.2</b>	0.1	23.2	0.9	<b>-1.9</b>	0.4	15.2	0.6	-0.9	0.3	38.6	1.2	-1.2	1.5
Minnesota	14.9	0.6	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.9</b>	17.5	1.1	1.5	1.5	10.4	0.8	-0.1	<b>1.3</b>	24.0	1.7	<b>3.1</b>	0.8
Mississippi	29.4	1.2	<b>-4.6</b>	-1.6	35.7	1.5	<b>-3.9</b>	<b>-2.2</b>	16.6	1.8	<b>-4.2</b>	-2.2	37.6	3.6	<b>-10.0</b>	4.9
Missouri	21.1	0.7	<b>-1.1</b>	0.4	25.4	1.4	<b>-4.6</b>	-1.0	15.8	0.9	0.6	0.7	30.2	1.9	-1.4	1.3
Montana	18.5	1.5	<b>-2.8</b>	<b>-2.9</b>	21.1	1.7	-1.8	-1.1	12.1	3.8	0.0	1.0	14.8	3.7	<b>-7.6</b>	<b>-9.9</b>
Nebraska	16.2	1.1	-1.5	0.9	16.6	1.5	-0.8	1.5	8.0	1.4	-0.5	-0.1	21.0	2.1	<b>-3.1</b>	1.7
Nevada	22.0	1.2	-0.7	<b>4.4</b>	20.6	3.9	-1.5	<b>6.9</b>	21.0	1.7	-0.5	<b>4.6</b>	23.1	1.9	-0.7	<b>3.4</b>
New Hampshire	13.0	1.4	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.3</b>	15.8	2.6	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	8.8	1.9	<b>2.5</b>	1.5	21.6	4.3	2.2	1.4
New Jersey	15.9	0.5	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>			N/A		12.8	0.5	-0.3	<b>1.0</b>	38.2	2.1	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>10.4</b>
New Mexico	29.5	1.4	-1.6	<b>4.3</b>	30.9	2.3	-1.7	<b>6.7</b>	30.5	2.7	-2.7	2.6	27.4	2.8	-0.6	3.5
New York	22.6	0.4	-0.2	<b>2.6</b>	21.2	1.3	<b>-3.7</b>	0.2	12.9	0.5	0.2	<b>2.7</b>	31.5	0.7	-0.2	<b>3.2</b>
North Carolina	24.3	0.6	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>1.7</b>	32.2	1.4	-0.9	<b>3.4</b>	20.3	1.0	-0.4	<b>2.5</b>	25.0	1.2	<b>-1.7</b>	<b>2.0</b>
North Dakota	14.8	1.6	<b>2.8</b>	1.8	14.1	1.8	1.6	-1.0	11.0	3.6	3.5	<b>5.4</b>	18.3	4.1	3.8	4.2
Ohio	22.9	0.5	0.2	<b>1.1</b>	24.6	1.1	1.1	<b>1.7</b>	15.1	0.6	0.0	0.5	41.4	1.3	-0.7	<b>3.3</b>
Oklahoma	22.4	0.7	<b>-1.6</b>	0.2	23.9	1.1	<b>-2.7</b>	-1.4	16.5	1.1	-0.7	0.8	28.0	1.5	-1.5	1.1
Oregon	21.6	1.0	0.0	<b>2.5</b>	29.2	2.4	2.7	<b>4.8</b>	19.3	1.3	0.5	<b>3.0</b>	21.6	1.8	-1.9	1.6
Pennsylvania	19.4	0.5	0.0	<b>2.2</b>	21.1	1.1	1.1	<b>3.7</b>	13.0	0.5	0.3	<b>1.9</b>	37.1	1.4	-1.3	<b>2.7</b>
Rhode Island	19.8	1.7	-1.7	<b>2.9</b>			N/A		18.5	2.0	2.3	<b>3.2</b>	23.8	3.8	<b>-12.2</b>	3.7
South Carolina	27.1	1.0	-0.4	<b>2.6</b>	37.7	2.7	-2.1	<b>4.2</b>	23.6	1.2	-0.7	<b>3.7</b>	31.9	2.5	2.8	2.9
South Dakota	18.0	1.3	-0.6	-0.5	22.8	1.7	0.7	0.3	6.4	2.1	<b>-5.5</b>	-2.1	17.6	3.2	0.3	-0.4
Tennessee	26.2	0.8	-0.3	<b>2.3</b>	28.1	1.6	-0.3	<b>3.1</b>	17.4	1.0	-0.9	<b>1.6</b>	35.8	1.3	0.2	<b>3.5</b>
Texas	24.6	0.4	-0.5	0.2	26.3	1.1	<b>-3.2</b>	-0.8	18.9	0.6	<b>-1.1</b>	0.3	30.0	0.6	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.9</b>
Utah	13.3	0.8	<b>-1.5</b>	1.1	16.5	2.7	0.2	0.2	10.6	0.9	<b>-2.1</b>	<b>1.3</b>	22.3	2.4	0.5	1.0
Vermont	15.8	1.9	0.5	<b>2.5</b>	18.3	2.5	0.9	<b>3.3</b>	8.1	2.8	-4.1	-1.2			N/A	
Virginia	15.8	0.6	0.1	<b>1.9</b>	24.6	2.0	0.9	2.7	11.9	0.7	0.7	<b>2.4</b>	22.1	1.3	<b>-2.3</b>	1.2
Washington	17.5	0.7	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>1.3</b>	23.3	2.0	-0.8	0.0	14.4	0.8	<b>-1.3</b>	0.8	21.3	1.4	-1.6	<b>2.5</b>
West Virginia	24.7	1.4	<b>-2.3</b>	1.1	26.5	2.2	-3.0	-2.7	20.9	2.0	-0.6	<b>3.8</b>	34.1	4.8	-6.4	6.3
Wisconsin	18.4	0.6	0.0	<b>1.8</b>	18.6	1.1	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.7</b>	10.6	0.8	0.0	1.1	30.1	1.4	-1.3	1.3
Wyoming	12.8	1.7	-0.4	0.2	13.0	2.1	-0.7	0.1			N/A		13.1	4.0	0.4	2.3

Note: Change is displayed in percentage points and based on unrounded percentages. Results may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using rounded figures. Bold font indicates a statistically significant change ( $p < 0.05$ ). Margins of error (“+/-”) refer to the 95 percent confidence interval around the 2014 estimated percent. Source: American Community Survey, 2009, 2013, and 2014 1-year estimates.

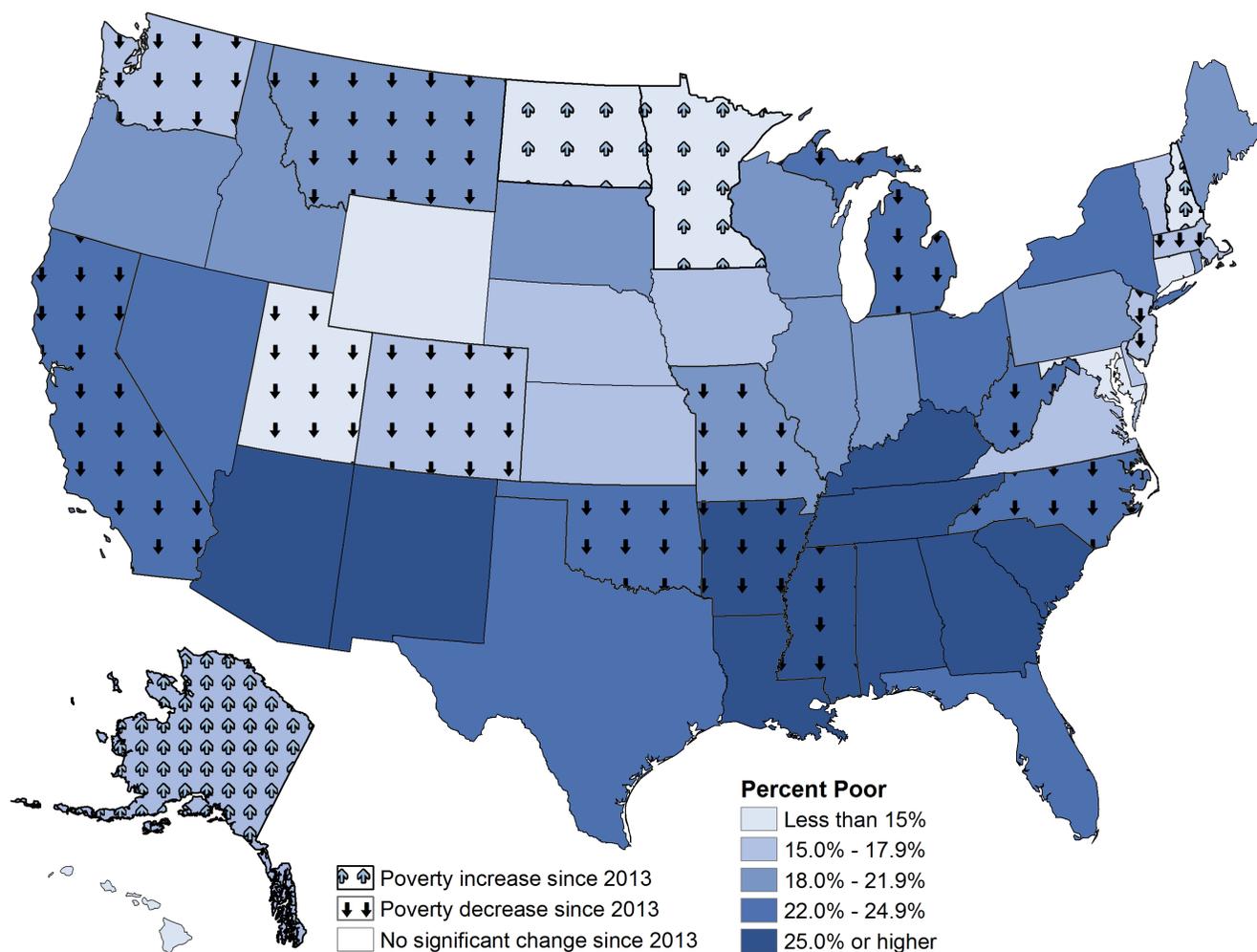
poverty rate remained stable between 2013 and 2014 whereas other regions experienced a decline. Child poverty remained higher than in 2009 (post-recession) in nearly every region and place type, with the sole exception of the rural Midwest, where the 2014 child poverty rate was similar to the 2009 rate.

State-by-state variations in child poverty rates are illustrated in Figure 1. States with poverty rates below 15 percent included

Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. At the other end of the spectrum, rates in Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington DC were above 25 percent. Between 2013 and 2014, changes in child poverty were not consistent across states: while fourteen witnessed a decline in

child poverty over the year, four experienced a significant increase. Looking over a longer period—from the end of the Great Recession in 2009 until 2014—twenty states had child poverty rates similar to those at the end of the Great Recession, and two states—Colorado and Montana—had rates that were lower. Worth noting, however, is that the poverty rate has not fallen below its pre-recession rate in any state (data available upon request).

**FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY, 2014, OFFICIAL POVERTY MEASURE**



Source: American Community Survey 2013 and 2014 1-year estimates.

## Place-Based Patterns Persist in Other “Poverty” Measures

In addition to tracking trends in child poverty over time, the analysis of other income-based measures in conjunction with children’s designation as poor or not poor can further improve our understanding of children’s economic well-being. For instance, there is considerable evidence that the official poverty measure is an inadequate indicator of need, and multiple methods for improving assessments of income, including the U.S. Census Bureau’s Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM),<sup>2</sup> have been proposed. Although the data used here allow us to examine sub-state geographies, they do not provide SPM measures or the information necessary to compute the SPM. Instead, we expand our exploration of children’s economic well-being by documenting the share of children who live not only below 100 percent of the poverty line, as above, but also below 50 percent of the federal poverty line (“deeply poor”) and below 200 percent (“low income”).<sup>3</sup>

These categorizations have measured implications for children. First, we chose a “low-income” indicator of less than 200 percent of poverty based on research which has found that families require incomes between 1.5 and 3.5 times the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic household needs.<sup>4</sup> For a single parent with two children, the 200 percent threshold equates to \$38,146 per year, \$3,179 per month, or \$34.84 per person, per day. Families with incomes below those levels very likely have difficulty meeting basic day-to-day

needs, and parents may curtail spending on certain necessities like nutritious food or medications in order to pay rent or utilities. Second, we incorporate a measure of deep poverty, as research identifies a concentration of the deleterious effects of poverty, including worse cognitive scores and greater behavioral problems, at incomes at or below 50 percent of the poverty line.<sup>5</sup> For a single parent with two children, this equates to \$9,536 per year, \$795 per month, or \$8.71 per person, per day.

As shown in Table 2, 44.1 percent of children live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty line. The share of children living below this threshold varies substantially across the nation. For instance, more than half of children in cities and rural places live in low-income families (52.9 and 51.7 percent, respectively), compared with just 36.9 percent of suburban children. In suburbs and cities, the share of children who were in low-income families fell between 2013 and 2014, though rates were stable in rural places and remain elevated compared to post-recession levels in all place types. The Midwest and West experienced declines in low-income rates between 2013 and 2014. Rates of low-income children were more stable than child poverty rates between 2013 and 2014, with only five states (California, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Utah) experiencing declining shares of children in low-income families, and no states experiencing increases.

Figure 2 on page 6 shows the share of children by state who lived in deeply poor families (incomes

below 50 percent of the poverty line) in 2014.<sup>6</sup> As with other patterns in child economic well-being, the states with the highest rates of deep poverty tend to be clustered in the South. Nationwide, nearly one in ten children (9.6 percent) lived in deeply poor families, down 0.3 percentage point since 2013 but still nearly a full percentage point above 2009 post-recession levels. In most states, the share of children who were deeply poor remained stable between 2013 and 2014. However, higher shares of children were deeply poor in Maine and North Dakota, while rates dropped in seven other states (Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, and North Carolina).

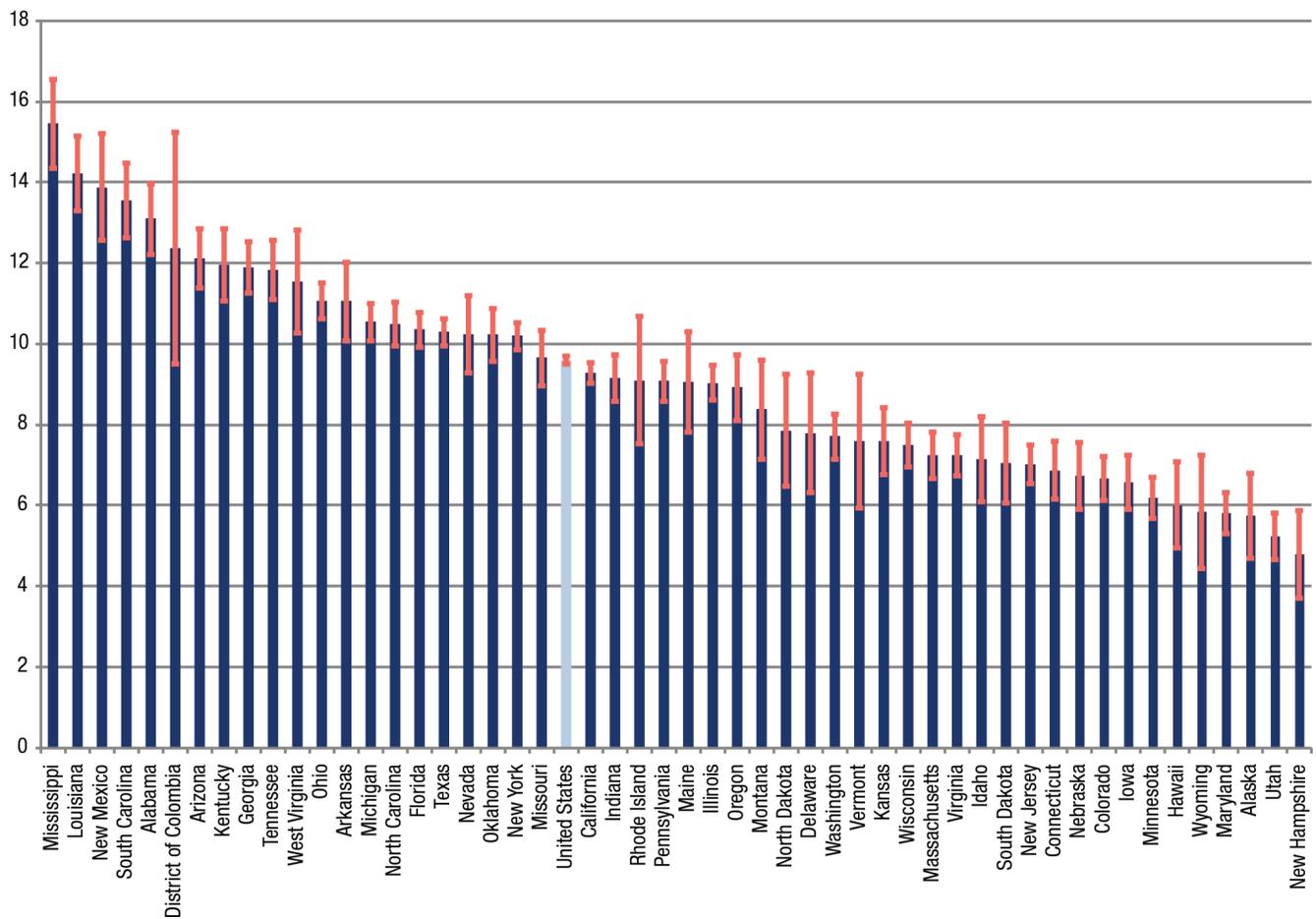
## Poor Children Can Be Clustered in States Where Poverty Rates Are ‘Low’

Finally, although rates of children living below 200, 100, and 50 percent of the poverty threshold are especially high in the South, it is important to also consider how the size and distribution of the child population shapes where vulnerable children are concentrated. For example, California is home to more low-income children (4.1 million) than are the twenty-three states with the fewest low-income children combined (see Figure 3 on page 7), despite its near-average low-income rate of 46.0 percent. In contrast, New Mexico has among the highest shares of children in low-income families, at 55.5 percent, but is home to just 274,000 or 6.6 percent as many, low-income children as California.

TABLE 2. PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, BY STATE AND PLACE TYPE, 2014

	ALL PLACES				RURAL				SUBURBAN				CITY			
	Percent Low Income	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009	Percent Low Income	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009	Percent Low Income	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009	Percent Low Income	+/-	Change Since 2013	Change Since 2009
United States	44.1	0.2	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>2.2</b>	51.7	0.5	-0.6	<b>1.5</b>	36.9	0.2	<b>-0.6</b>	<b>2.8</b>	52.9	0.3	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>
Northeast	37.6	0.4	-0.2	<b>3.2</b>	43.6	1.3	-0.9	1.5	27.9	0.5	-0.1	<b>2.8</b>	56.6	0.9	-0.4	<b>5.5</b>
Midwest	41.5	0.4	<b>-0.7</b>	<b>0.9</b>	46.6	0.7	-0.6	0.4	32.0	0.5	<b>-1.0</b>	<b>1.2</b>	55.1	0.8	-0.3	<b>1.5</b>
South	47.9	0.3	-0.3	<b>2.3</b>	57.9	0.8	-1.0	<b>2.4</b>	41.4	0.4	-0.3	<b>3.2</b>	54.5	0.6	-0.2	<b>2.2</b>
West	44.6	0.4	<b>-1.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	50.0	1.2	0.3	<b>2.3</b>	41.3	0.5	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>2.9</b>	47.8	0.6	<b>-1.1</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Alabama	51.1	1.6	-0.1	<b>2.4</b>	61.0	3.2	2.4	<b>5.4</b>	43.1	2.2	-2.2	1.4	57.0	3.1	1.4	3.9
Alaska	33.6	2.6	0.5	0.6	41.7	3.3	-4.2	-0.5	22.9	4.0	-1.2	-3.7	33.3	5.1	5.2	3.7
Arizona	50.5	1.4	-1.0	<b>2.8</b>	65.9	4.7	-2.2	5.9	42.9	1.9	-1.9	1.5	56.1	2.0	0.0	<b>4.7</b>
Arkansas	53.2	2.0	-2.1	-0.4	60.0	3.0	-3.2	0.4	45.1	3.0	-1.9	-2.1	54.2	4.2	-0.6	1.1
California	46.0	0.6	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>2.5</b>	50.9	3.8	3.1	5.3	44.5	0.7	<b>-1.1</b>	<b>3.6</b>	47.7	0.8	<b>-1.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Colorado	36.9	1.4	-1.1	0.6	46.0	3.8	-0.8	-0.1	28.9	1.8	-0.5	0.9	44.3	2.2	-1.9	0.0
Connecticut	31.8	1.5	1.3	<b>5.7</b>	19.1	4.7	1.7	-3.9	24.7	1.7	1.8	<b>5.3</b>	49.9	3.3	-0.4	<b>7.4</b>
Delaware	37.9	3.2	-1.7	1.4			N/A		35.9	3.3	0.2	<b>5.5</b>	53.4	11.3	<b>-15.4</b>	-11.8
District of Columbia	44.1	5.1	-3.5	-4.8			N/A				N/A		44.1	5.1	-3.5	-4.8
Florida	49.8	0.9	0.1	<b>3.9</b>	63.2	4.8	0.4	4.0	47.1	1.1	-0.3	<b>3.6</b>	55.8	1.8	1.1	<b>5.7</b>
Georgia	49.5	1.1	-1.0	<b>4.3</b>	59.8	2.5	-2.5	1.9	44.8	1.4	-0.2	<b>5.7</b>	57.1	2.9	-2.5	0.4
Hawaii	32.8	2.4	-0.2	1.3	39.5	6.0	-9.1	4.1	29.4	3.0	1.5	-1.9	35.5	4.6	2.6	<b>9.3</b>
Idaho	47.3	2.5	-1.9	0.5	52.8	4.0	0.1	1.1	44.4	3.5	<b>-5.7</b>	2.4	45.0	5.1	2.4	-2.2
Illinois	40.8	0.9	-0.6	<b>1.4</b>	46.0	2.1	-1.5	0.1	33.8	1.1	-0.4	<b>3.3</b>	52.2	1.7	-0.8	0.3
Indiana	45.4	1.2	-0.6	<b>2.3</b>	48.0	2.4	0.1	0.6	34.3	1.6	-2.2	1.5	59.3	2.5	0.5	3.4
Iowa	36.9	1.5	-0.5	-0.5	41.9	2.3	1.1	1.3	22.6	2.3	-3.1	-2.6	45.1	3.2	-0.4	-0.3
Kansas	40.7	1.6	-0.7	0.0	46.9	2.7	0.6	-3.8	27.8	2.4	-1.6	-2.0	48.0	3.2	-1.1	4.3
Kentucky	49.0	1.6	1.3	0.5	55.1	2.4	-0.5	-2.4	40.2	2.4	1.7	0.8	51.4	3.5	3.8	<b>5.0</b>
Louisiana	50.8	1.7	0.7	<b>4.9</b>	59.8	3.7	-0.6	<b>5.7</b>	44.4	2.3	0.2	<b>6.3</b>	58.2	3.4	2.5	<b>7.5</b>
Maine	41.3	2.6	-0.9	1.3	49.9	3.9	0.2	2.1	31.4	3.6	-1.7	0.6	50.3	8.3	-2.7	4.4
Maryland	31.6	1.2	0.5	<b>4.3</b>	44.4	6.9	-3.6	<b>9.9</b>	27.7	1.3	0.2	<b>4.6</b>	45.4	2.9	2.1	0.4
Massachusetts	29.9	1.1	-1.1	<b>2.7</b>	30.4	7.2	-6.3	N/A	25.0	1.2	-1.4	<b>2.6</b>	50.3	3.0	0.2	<b>6.8</b>
Michigan	44.4	0.9	-1.1	0.1	50.1	1.8	-1.9	0.3	34.6	1.1	-1.5	1.1	62.3	2.2	0.9	0.3
Minnesota	33.6	1.1	0.3	0.9	41.2	1.9	1.5	0.8	26.2	1.4	-1.3	1.8	44.8	2.8	3.4	1.4
Mississippi	55.1	2.0	-2.7	0.4	61.7	2.7	-2.9	0.0	42.0	3.1	-0.8	1.1	62.8	6.2	<b>-8.9</b>	2.7
Missouri	43.5	1.4	<b>-2.0</b>	-0.2	55.4	2.5	<b>-3.7</b>	-0.7	34.8	1.7	-0.4	0.1	52.3	3.1	-4.0	-0.6
Montana	43.7	3.0	-0.2	-1.9	46.4	3.6	0.2	-1.0	36.0	7.5	0.4	2.4	40.4	6.9	-1.6	-6.7
Nebraska	38.5	1.9	<b>-3.1</b>	0.0	40.8	2.7	<b>-4.4</b>	-3.3	22.9	2.7	-2.6	-1.8	46.5	3.7	-2.8	<b>6.2</b>
Nevada	49.6	2.2	0.1	<b>7.9</b>	45.8	6.3	1.4	<b>12.4</b>	50.1	3.1	-0.6	<b>9.7</b>	50.0	3.0	0.5	<b>4.8</b>
New Hampshire	28.4	2.5	-0.1	2.7	32.9	4.2	-0.5	2.4	21.1	3.3	0.7	2.6	43.5	7.1	-0.5	5.2
New Jersey	32.3	1.0	-0.5	<b>3.1</b>			N/A		27.7	1.0	-0.2	1.3	64.9	3.3	-3.4	<b>13.1</b>
New Mexico	55.5	2.5	0.7	<b>3.6</b>	58.4	4.0	1.7	2.6	55.9	4.2	-1.2	4.4	52.2	4.4	1.4	3.9
New York	42.7	0.7	0.1	<b>3.8</b>	46.6	2.3	-1.7	2.0	28.4	1.0	0.3	<b>4.5</b>	55.0	1.2	0.0	<b>3.9</b>
North Carolina	49.6	1.1	0.3	<b>3.4</b>	61.3	2.3	0.4	<b>7.8</b>	44.0	1.6	1.2	<b>3.0</b>	50.4	2.0	-0.9	<b>4.2</b>
North Dakota	31.9	2.9	1.2	-0.3	32.3	3.8	-1.7	-3.2	24.3	5.1	0.0	1.9	36.0	6.1	6.8	3.1
Ohio	44.3	0.9	0.0	<b>1.5</b>	49.0	1.9	-0.2	1.2	33.8	1.1	-0.2	1.1	66.6	2.1	0.4	<b>4.3</b>
Oklahoma	47.9	1.3	<b>-2.6</b>	-1.1	52.3	2.0	-2.4	-2.3	38.2	1.9	<b>-3.2</b>	-2.0	55.3	2.8	-2.4	1.5
Oregon	46.4	1.8	0.7	<b>3.6</b>	56.0	4.2	0.5	4.5	43.2	2.5	1.2	<b>5.0</b>	46.5	3.0	0.1	3.0
Pennsylvania	39.7	0.9	-0.3	<b>2.2</b>	46.9	2.1	-0.6	1.0	30.0	0.9	0.1	<b>2.0</b>	64.9	2.6	-1.4	<b>4.8</b>
Rhode Island	39.9	3.0	-0.3	3.0			N/A		34.5	3.2	-0.1	3.2	56.2	6.7	1.1	7.9
South Carolina	51.6	1.7	-0.1	<b>3.4</b>	63.7	3.9	-2.5	4.8	48.5	2.0	0.7	<b>4.9</b>	53.9	3.7	-1.5	2.5
South Dakota	40.4	2.6	-0.8	-1.2	46.0	3.5	0.5	0.9	26.4	5.2	-3.4	-2.9	40.3	5.5	-2.0	-3.1
Tennessee	50.6	1.4	0.1	<b>3.4</b>	58.4	2.8	0.3	<b>5.7</b>	39.1	1.8	-0.5	<b>3.0</b>	60.0	2.8	0.6	3.9
Texas	49.1	0.7	-0.6	0.0	54.3	1.9	-1.9	-1.3	41.3	1.0	-1.0	1.2	55.8	1.0	0.1	0.1
Utah	36.9	1.5	<b>-2.2</b>	0.7	42.2	4.4	1.0	-1.3	32.8	1.7	-2.1	1.9	50.3	3.9	-4.0	-2.1
Vermont	35.9	3.2	-0.8	4.1	39.7	4.0	-1.1	1.8	24.5	5.4	-5.7	5.4			N/A	
Virginia	34.7	1.1	-0.1	<b>3.4</b>	53.9	3.3	2.8	<b>6.5</b>	27.9	1.2	0.3	<b>3.6</b>	44.0	2.2	-3.2	<b>3.4</b>
Washington	38.6	1.2	-1.4	<b>1.8</b>	51.6	3.8	1.0	2.4	33.9	1.5	<b>-2.7</b>	0.9	43.1	2.2	0.2	<b>3.2</b>
West Virginia	49.7	2.6	0.9	2.7	52.3	4.0	0.1	0.6	45.7	3.6	2.1	4.5	57.4	6.2	-1.1	5.3
Wisconsin	39.2	1.1	-0.6	<b>2.2</b>	43.5	1.9	1.4	<b>4.1</b>	25.5	1.4	-1.1	0.6	56.2	2.5	-1.6	2.2
Wyoming	35.0	3.5	2.8	0.2	36.7	4.2	3.9	2.8			N/A		31.7	6.7	-0.3	-2.5

Note: "Low-income" is defined as children in families with incomes below 200 percent of the official federal poverty level. Change is displayed in percentage points and based on unrounded percentages. Results may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using rounded figures. Bold font indicates a statistically significant change ( $p < 0.05$ ). Margins of error ("±") refer to the 95 percent confidence interval around the 2014 estimated percent. Source: American Community Survey, 2009, 2013, and 2014 1-year estimates.

**FIGURE 2. PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN DEEP POVERTY, BY STATE, 2014**

Note: Bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. We include these bars to indicate the level of (im)precision associated with estimating deep poverty at the state level. Source: American Community Survey, 2014 1-year estimates.

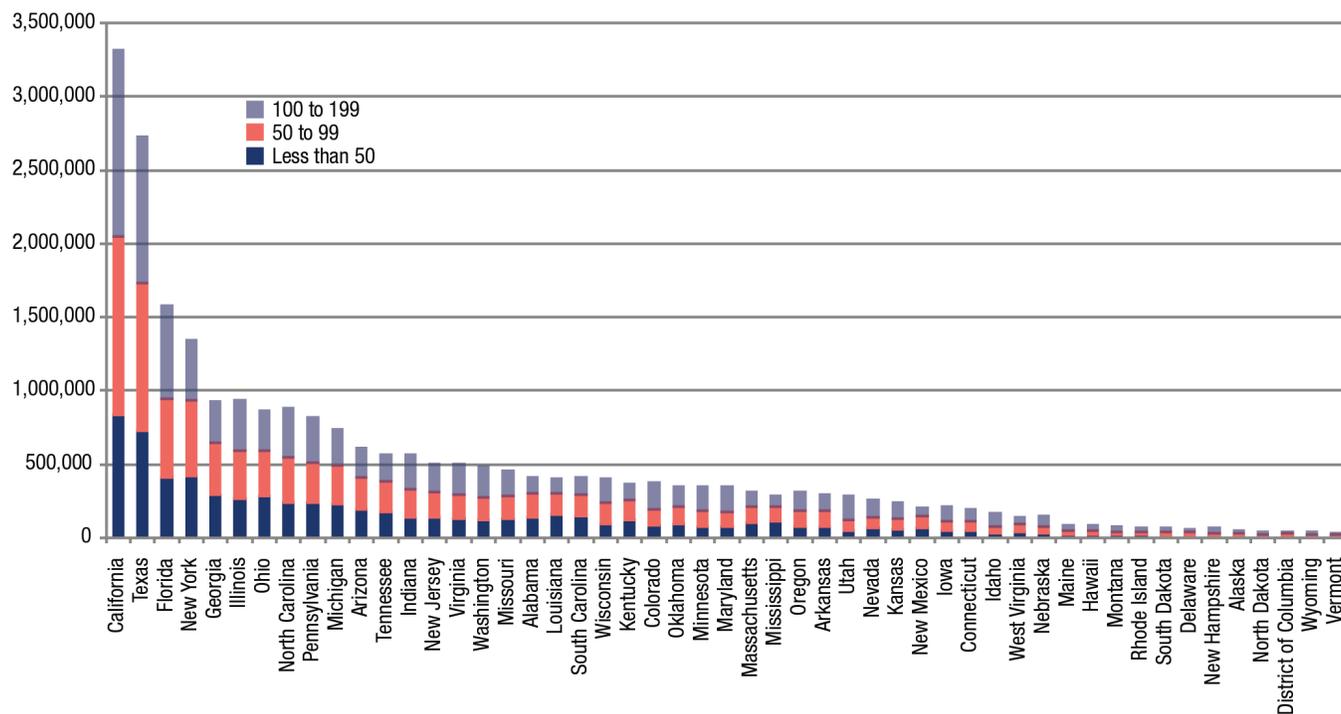
## Implications

Not only are higher shares of children living in poverty than prior to the Great Recession, but nearly one in ten children live in families with incomes below half of the poverty line, that is, with incomes below \$12,004 for a family of two adults and two children. That nearly 7 million American children are living in such deeply poor homes highlights the necessity of the social safety net. It is important to note that

although policy interventions like tax credits or other work supports may improve the quality of life for many children, the impact of these interventions may not show up in official poverty statistics, since official statistics do not consider these supports in their calculations. As a result, policy makers might consider using innovative measures like the Supplemental Poverty Measure or additional calculations using the official poverty measure in assessing the efficacy of safety net efforts. In calculating

the SPM, the U.S. Census Bureau has identified an important role for programs like refundable tax credits, albeit only for children whom such programs reach.<sup>7</sup>

Further, despite tremendous variation in the cost of living across the nation, the official poverty measure does not make adjustments for family income purchasing power. That is, poor families may be able to afford better housing or more nutritious food in relatively inexpensive states like Indiana or Kentucky

**FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF CHILDREN AT SELECTED PERCENTAGES OF POVERTY THRESHOLD, 2014**

Source: American Community Survey, 2014 1-year estimates.

than in more expensive places like California or New York, or in less-expensive rural places than in costlier urban centers.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, research suggests that, depending on geography, families need between 1.5 and 3.5 times the poverty line to meet their basic needs of housing, food, child care, health insurance, medical care, transportation, and taxes. That more than four in ten of the nation's children live in low-income homes highlights the critical importance of both improving access to opportunity and of making work pay for America's most vulnerable families. Given dramatic differences in the cost of living across the nation, it may be worthwhile to consider making or increasing geographic adjustments to a host of safety net programs.

## Data

This analysis is based on estimates from the 2009, 2013, and 2014 American Community Survey. Tables were produced by aggregating information from detailed tables available on American FactFinder (<http://factfinder.census.gov>). These estimates give perspective on child poverty, but they are based on survey data, so caution must be exercised in comparing across years or places. All differences highlighted in this brief are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Box 1: Definition of Rural, Suburban, and City

Definitions of rural and urban vary among researchers and the sources of data they use. Data for this brief are derived from the American Community Survey, which identifies each household as being within one of several geographic components. As used here, "city" designates households in the principal city of a given metropolitan statistical area, and "suburban" includes those in metropolitan areas but not within the principal city of that area. "Rural" consists of the addresses that are not within a metropolitan area.

## Endnotes

1. “Poverty Thresholds” (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld>.

2. See Kathleen Short, “The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2014,” Current Population Reports, P60-254 (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-254.pdf>.

3. We use these terms for purposes of brevity, though, unlike “poor,” there is no official definition of “deeply poor” or “low income.” However, there is precedent for these terms as applied here. See, for example, Serena Lei, “The Unwaged War on Deep Poverty” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2013), [www.urban.org/features/unwaged-war-deep-poverty](http://www.urban.org/features/unwaged-war-deep-poverty), and Gordon M. Fisher, “Standard Budgets (Basic Needs Budgets) in the United States Since 2006” (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), [www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/publications/other/udusbd3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/publications/other/udusbd3.pdf).

4. See, for example, Kinsey Alden Dinan, “Budgeting for Basic Needs: A Struggle for Working Families” (New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, 2009), <http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac%3A126290>. See also Fisher 2012.

5. See, for example, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg J. Duncan, “The Effects of Poverty on Children,” *The Future of Children* 7, no. 2 (1997): 55–71; J.D. McLeod and M.J. Shanahan, “Poverty, Parenting, and Children’s Mental Health,” *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 351–66; Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne, T. Leventhal, and Greg J. Duncan, “Why Poverty Matters for Young Children: Implications for Policy,” in J.D. Osofsky and H.E. Fitzgerald, eds., *WAIMH Handbook of Infant Mental Health: Vol. 3. Parenting and Child Care* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1999); J.R. Smith, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and P.K. Klebenov, “The Consequences of Living in Poverty for Young Children’s Cognitive and Verbal Ability and Early School Achievement,” in G.J. Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn, eds., *Consequences of Growing Up Poor* (New York, NY: Russell Sage, 1997); and R. Gabriela Barajas, Nina Philipsen, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, “Cognitive and Emotional Outcomes for Children in Poverty,” in D.R. Crane and T.B. Heaton, eds., *Handbook of Families & Poverty* (New York, NY: SAGE Publications, 2007).

6. Unlike for the tables, this figure does not provide state estimates broken down by place type. We omit these estimates due to insufficient sample size among the lowest-income children.

7. See Short 2015.

8. For information on state-by-state cost of living, see “Cost of Living Data Series” (Jefferson City: Missouri Department of Economic Development, Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, 2015), [https://www.missourieconomy.org/indicators/cost\\_of\\_living/](https://www.missourieconomy.org/indicators/cost_of_living/). For a comparison of rural and urban expenditures, see William Hawk, “Expenditures of Urban and Rural Households in 2011,” Bureau of Labor Statistics: Beyond the Numbers, Prices and Spending 2, no. 5 (2013), <http://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-2/expenditures-of-urban-and-rural-households-in-2011.htm>.

## About The Authors

Jess Carson is a vulnerable families research scientist at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire ([jessica.carson@unh.edu](mailto:jessica.carson@unh.edu)).

Andrew Schaefer is a vulnerable families research associate at the Carsey School of Public Policy and a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of New Hampshire ([andrew.schaefer@unh.edu](mailto:andrew.schaefer@unh.edu)).

Beth Mattingly is director of research on vulnerable families at the Carsey School of Public Policy and a research assistant professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire ([beth.mattingly@unh.edu](mailto:beth.mattingly@unh.edu)).

## Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and anonymous donors. The authors thank Barbara Cook, Sarah Leonard, and Jennifer Clayton for research assistance; Michele Dillon, Michael Ettlinger, Curt Grimm, and Amy Sterndale for their feedback on earlier drafts; Laurel Lloyd and Bianca Nicolosi at the Carsey School of Public Policy for their layout assistance; and Patrick Watson for his editorial assistance.



**University of New Hampshire**  
Carsey School of Public Policy

The Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire is a nationally acclaimed resource for research, leadership development, and engaged scholarship relevant to public policy. We address the most pressing challenges of the twenty-first century, striving for innovative, responsive, and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

Huddleston Hall • 73 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824  
(603) 862-2821

TTY USERS: DIAL 7-1-1 OR 1-800-735-2964 (RELAY N.H.)  
[carsey.unh.edu](http://carsey.unh.edu)