

Study Shows Colorado Has Largest Rise in Child Poverty

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DENVER — [Colorado](#) experienced the nation's largest rate of growth in impoverished children from 2000 to 2006, according to a study released Tuesday.

The study, by the Colorado Children's Campaign, a nonprofit group that focuses on child welfare, said that the most recent census data show that 180,000 children — 15.7 percent of the state total — were living in poverty in Colorado in 2006, a 73 percent increase since 2000.

New Hampshire and Delaware experienced the second- and third-largest rates of increase in child poverty, about 47 percent and 45 percent respectively.

No single factor can explain the increase in Colorado, the study said, but a growing number of single parent households, a shortage of jobs for lower wage workers and a low rate of high school graduation contributed.

Shifting demographics also played a role, with an increase in the number of Hispanic children, who are more likely to live in poverty or drop out of high school, the study said.

“What the data is telling us is that we're headed in the wrong direction in terms of taking care of our lower-income population,” the president of the Colorado Children's Campaign, Megan Ferland, said.

Ms. Ferland cited another contributing variable, which she called the “Colorado paradox”: well-educated transplants drawn to a state that also has many poorly educated residents.

“We have too many of our working class families who are actually slipping into low-income brackets and becoming families who are living in extreme poverty,” Ms. Ferland said.

The most pronounced rates of child poverty were found in urban centers like Denver and in southern rural areas like Alamosa and Costilla Counties.

Minority children were particularly affected. The number of the state's American Indian children living in poverty increased by 473 percent, the report said, and the number of impoverished black children grew by 116 percent. In contrast, the number of impoverished white children grew by 57 percent, and for Asian children, it declined by 10 percent.

At a news conference on Tuesday, Gov. Bill Ritter Jr. called the statistics “awful” and said that “they clearly demonstrate that we have a responsibility to people who live on the margins.”

“It's intolerable that 180,000 children are living in poverty in this state,” said Mr. Ritter, a Democrat who took office last year.

In a supplemental document, the Colorado Children's Campaign said the state spent less per capita on its residents than its neighbors to the north and south, Wyoming and New Mexico. Those states experienced a decrease in child poverty during the same six years as the study.

Colorado ranks 44th in per capita spending, according to the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, a research and advocacy group that focuses on tax and budget issues.

“This report and this finding validate a lot of what we largely know, in that Colorado continues to lag behind in key areas of public investment,” an institute spokesman, Scott Downes, said. “That prevents us from creating the kind of future that we want for our communities, our children and generations to come.”

Mr. Downes attributed the situation in part to a “knot of fiscal restraints” like a 1992 constitutional amendment, the Tax Payer's Bill of Rights, that was intended to restrain state spending.

Colorado remained slightly below the national rate of child poverty of about 18 percent. “But the concern is the rate at which we're growing,” Ms. Ferland said.