

March 19, 2019

Annie McKay, President and CEO  
Kansas Action for Children  
Informational Briefing  
House Rural Revitalization Committee

Chair Hineman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with your committee about the work of Kansas Action for Children (KAC). This year marks our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, having been established when the Kansas Children's Service League and three Junior Leagues recognized the need for an independent voice for Kansas kids. Since that time, we have advocated for health, education, and economic policies benefiting the lives of Kansas kids and families. In working together and partnering with lawmakers, other organizations, agency leaders, communities, and leading experts, we believe Kansas can be the best state to raise and be a child. But we have work to do to realize this vision.

Every Kansas kid – from birth to elementary school – should have access to high-quality early education, nurturing places and spaces, and routine health care. These investments in the early years create a rock-solid foundation for growth and development that lasts a lifetime. We know that no two Kansas kids or communities are alike, and, for that reason, we should carefully consider an array of policy and administrative tools to meet the needs of children in our great state.

Informed by KIDS COUNT data, we have a clear view of the challenges and opportunities facing rural Kansas kids ahead. At KAC we believe that you can't have a conversation about revitalizing rural Kansas without children being central to the decisions being made. With this in mind, there are four key indicators we'd look to in framing a broad understanding of what's impacting rural Kansas kids:

- Demographics
- Poverty
- Child Care Assistance
- Health Insurance

It's important to have a full understanding of how Kansas demographics are shifting to anticipate future needs that can be addressed by policy decisions made now. With percentages of Kansas kids of color increasing, we know that we must address the longstanding legacies of unfairness created by systemic racism that can be seen in a broad range of indicators – from children's health insurance coverage to infant mortality and from high-quality early care to achievement gaps seen in elementary years.

Poverty is an important predictor of a child's achievement in adult years – children who experience poverty are less likely to graduate from high school, attend and complete college compared with kids who never experience living in poverty, with

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stark disparities seen by race.<sup>1</sup> As it relates to rural Kansas kids, frontier and rural counties continue to have higher rates of childhood poverty than the overall state average. If we are to ensure today's rural Kansas kids living in poverty do not continue to struggle as adults, we must examine the full range of supports available to ameliorating poverty in rural Kansas.

The path out of poverty for Kansas families with children is multifaceted and involves successful employment of a child's caregivers. One way to support low-income working parents is to ensure their children have quality child care to enable them to maintain gainful employment. Child care assistance is one means of supporting these efforts, connecting eligible low-income working families to resources to support children accessing child care. Unfortunately, there has been a steady decline in the number of kids connected to this important resource, with a significant decrease seen in rural and frontier counties. Between 2013 and 2017, rural and frontier counties saw a decline of 36% of the number of kids and families leveraging this invaluable support; however, there was not a corresponding drop in poverty, employment, etc. Meaning that the precipitous decline couldn't simply be explained away by improving conditions. Not only does it make it harder for parents to get or keep a job when they don't have child care, it also matters for the development and well-being of young children – with the earliest years being the most critical for brain development. To be clear, kindergarten is starting after the buzzer. Kids who have the benefit of high-quality early care and learning show greater mental and social growth than kids who don't. Interventions for older children work, but they take longer and cost more.

Lastly, KIDS COUNT data tells us that children in rural (6%) and frontier counties (8.1%) face greater rates of being uninsured than Kansas' overall average (4.5%). We know that children with health insurance are more likely to access preventative care, preparing them to enter school ready to succeed and start on a healthier path into adulthood. The longitudinal data paints an even clearer picture, when kids are covered by public health insurance, like Kansas' Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Medicaid, they're more likely to attain higher levels of education and higher earnings as an adult.<sup>2</sup> While most Kansas kids are healthy, the only way to sustain is through routine health care, especially early in life.

The last two years have seen promising commitments to Kansas kids during legislative sessions yet more work remains. We look forward to partnering with lawmakers in the legislative biennium to leverage all the resources Kansas has available for kids and families to continue pursuit of the vision to make Kansas the best state to raise – and be – a kid.

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<sup>1</sup> Ratcliffe, Caroline. "Child Poverty and Adult Success." Urban Institute Low Income Working Families Initiative. September 2015.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/65766/2000369-Child-Poverty-and-Adult-Success.pdf>

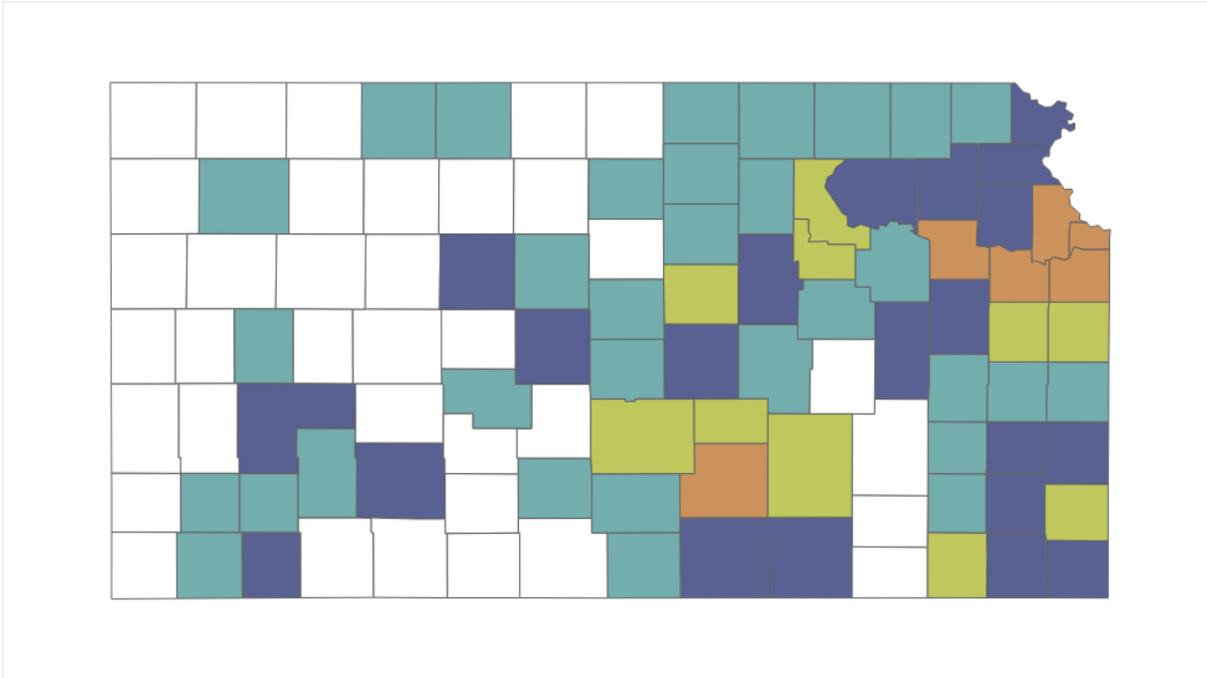
<sup>2</sup> *Data Spotlight: Insurance rates*. Kansas Action for Children, 2018. [https://kac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Insurance-6.20\\_digital.pdf](https://kac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Insurance-6.20_digital.pdf)

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## Peer Counties

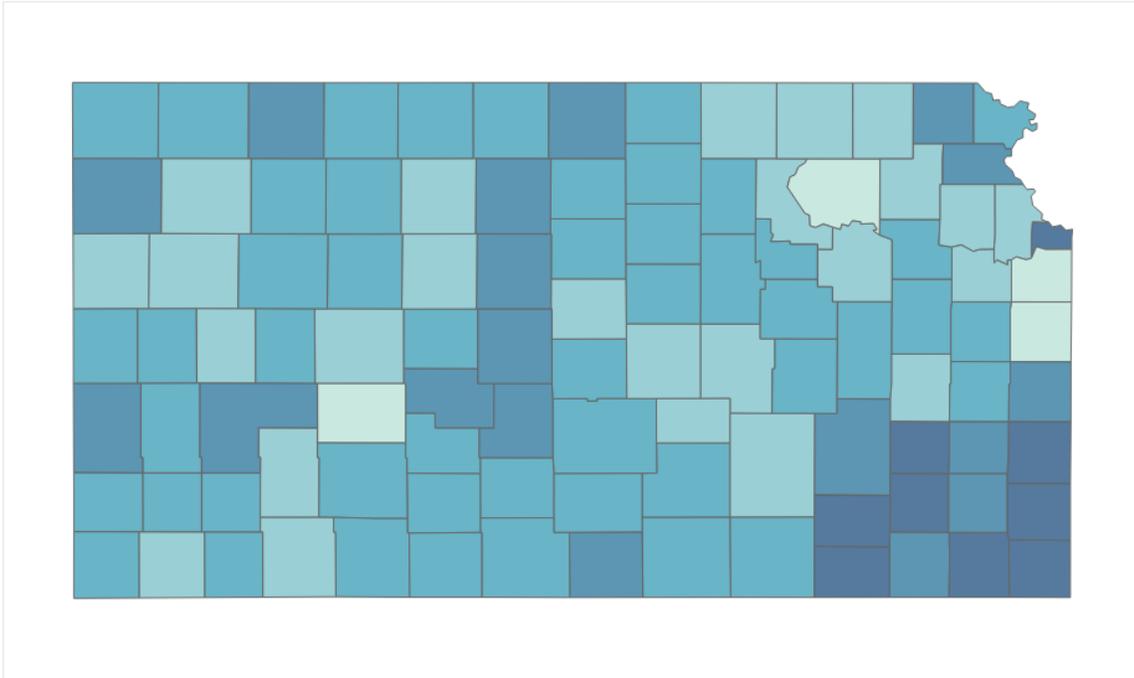


### Peer County

- Frontier
  - Rural
  - Densely-Settled Rural
  - Semi-Urban
  - Urban
- Frontier <6 (residents per square mile)  
 Rural 6.0-19.9 (rpsm)  
 Densely-Settled Rural 20.0-39.9 (rpsm)  
 Semi-Urban 40.1-149.9 (rpsm)  
 Urban >150 (rpsm)

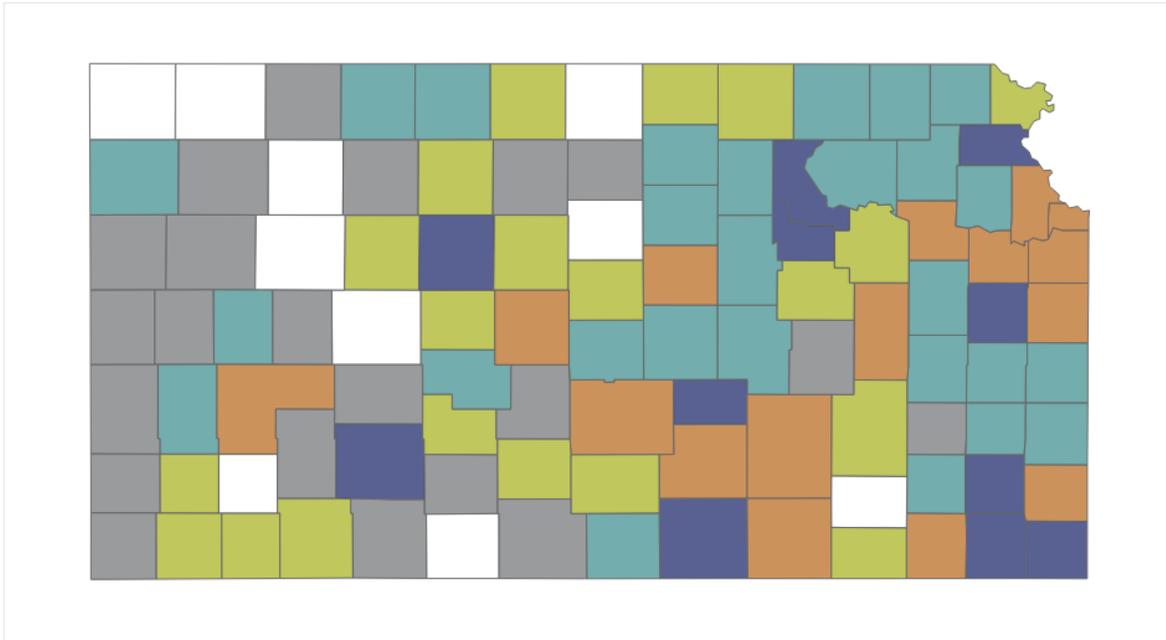
Source: 2018 KIDS  
 COUNT Data. Kansas  
 Action for Children.

## Children in rural counties are more likely to live in poverty



Source: 2018 KIDS COUNT. Kansas Action for Children. Data are based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE). The current rate represents the percentage for calendar year 2016.

## 10 Kansas counties are not benefiting from child care assistance

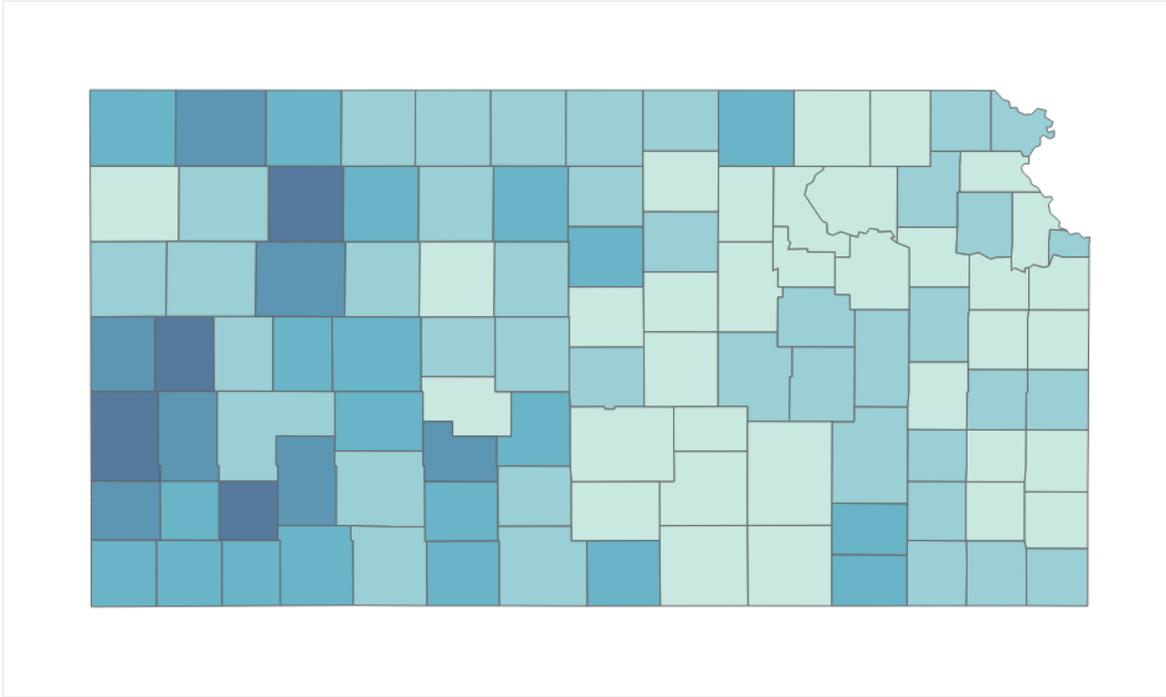


### Child Care Assistance

- 0
- <6
- 6-10
- 11-50
- 51-100
- 101+

Source: 2018 KIDS COUNT. Kansas Action for Children. Data are provided by the Kansas Department for Children and Families. The current number represents the average monthly number for state fiscal year 2017.

## Children in rural counties are less likely to have health insurance



**Uninsurance Rate**  
 2.94%  13.59%

Source: 2018 KIDS COUNT. Kansas Action for Children. Data are provided by the Small Area Health Insurance Estimate (SAHIE) of the U.S. Census Bureau. The current rate represents the annual percentage for calendar year 2016.