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## **North Carolina ranks as a near top state for babies**

*COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing disparities  
among young children and their families*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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WASHINGTON, DC – New data released today shows that North Carolina ranks as a near top state for babies, but still has room to grow. The *State of Babies Yearbook: 2021*, released today by national early childhood development nonprofit ZERO TO THREE, comes at a critical time in our nation’s response to the ongoing public health crisis and resulting economic fallout. The research compiles 60 indicators that affect the well-being of children ages zero to three and provides an in-depth look at national and state-by-state progress across three policy areas: Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences.

Though the pandemic itself was unexpected, our longstanding failure to support families with young children – particularly Black and Brown families and those with low income – ensured that those who were already facing barriers due to longstanding disparities and a lack of equity have been disproportionately harmed by the pandemic.

North Carolina was among thirteen states across the United States and the District of Columbia to earn an Improving Outcomes ranking. But despite its relatively high scores, the *State of Babies Yearbook: 2021* shows that the littlest North Carolinians still face big challenges, and that the policies and programs in North Carolina can make a difference in their ability to reach their full potential. The *Yearbook* highlights areas where North Carolina can do better for its babies.

“It has never been more important to tell the story of North Carolina’s babies. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the littlest among us did not have what they needed to thrive,” said Myra Jones-Taylor, chief policy officer of ZERO TO THREE. “We did not need a crystal ball to know that the pandemic would have lasting effects on children, their families, the state of North Carolina, and our nation. As advocates for babies, we must push for those permanent policies that we know will address the barriers our children face.”

North Carolina has made progress, but babies and families in all 100 counties of the state still face challenges and inequities in accessing health care, high-quality early education, family support services, and other economic supports. The *Yearbook* reveals that North Carolina continues to have one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, that child care is unaffordable and unavailable for working parents who need it, and that nearly half of the 361,000 infants and toddlers in the state live in poverty or households with low income, the majority of whom are children of color. These issues have been made worse by the pandemic, which is still shaping the early experiences of North Carolina’s babies every day.

“COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on many of the support systems for our youngest children and families,” said Michele Rivest, senior campaign director of the North Carolina Early Education Coalition and the Think Babies™

NC Alliance, a state partner of ZERO TO THREE's *Think Babies*™ initiative. "The *Yearbook* shows us how critical it is to make babies the top priority in our state's recovery and beyond. Now is the time to invest in policies and programs to ensure that families have the support and stability they need to give their babies a strong foundation for success and not a future that is undermined by the effects of this crisis."

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance created a set of policy priorities to address many of the issues highlighted in the *Yearbook*, such as the need for paid family leave, access to health care coverage, home visiting services, and financial assistance to help working families afford child care.

"Our work is focused on what all children in North Carolina need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and early learning," said Rivest. "We appreciate the fact that policymakers from Congress, to the Governor's Office, to the state General Assembly are making a commitment to supporting babies and their families."

Decisions that affect babies and families happen at all levels of government. The Think Babies™ NC Alliance has joined ZERO TO THREE and nearly 70 other national and state organizations to amplify the *Think Babies* message nationally and elevate the importance of the first three years in North Carolina. On May 18, they will join families and babies from all 50 states and DC to urge Congress to boldly invest in our future as part of the national *Strolling Thunder*™ event

To access the national profile and state data, visit [stateofbabies.org](http://stateofbabies.org).

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#### **About ZERO TO THREE**

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all infants and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers. For more information, and to learn how to become a ZERO TO THREE member, please visit [zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org), [facebook.com/zerotothree](https://facebook.com/zerotothree), or follow [@ZEROTOTHREE](https://twitter.com/ZEROTOTHREE) on Twitter.

#### **About *Think Babies*™**

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to make the potential of every baby a national priority. When we *Think Babies* and invest in infants, toddlers, and their families, we ensure a strong future for us all. Learn more at [thinkbabies.org](http://thinkbabies.org) or follow [@ZEROTOTHREE](https://twitter.com/ZEROTOTHREE) on Twitter.

#### **About the Think Babies™ NC Alliance**

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to ensure that North Carolina's youngest children, prenatal to age 3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences. This statewide initiative to support the healthy development of infants and toddlers is led by a cross-sector Leadership Team of public and private early childhood organizations at the local and state level. The Think Babies™ NC Alliance is a proud partner in the national ZERO TO THREE *Think Babies*™ campaign and the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers, which is funded in part by the Pritzker Children's Initiative. The NC Early Education Coalition serves as the backbone organization for the Think Babies™ NC Alliance. For more information, please visit [www.ThinkBabiesNC.org](http://www.ThinkBabiesNC.org).

#### **About the North Carolina Early Education Coalition**

The North Carolina Early Education Coalition works to ensure that all children – regardless of race, family income, or zip code – have access to high quality early care and learning experiences. Since 1990, the organization has highlighted the proven power of quality early childhood education by sharing information and resources with parents, professionals and policymakers. For more information, please visit [www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org](http://www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org), [facebook.com/nearlyedcoalition](https://facebook.com/nearlyedcoalition) or follow [@NCEarlyEdCo](https://twitter.com/NCEarlyEdCo) on Twitter.