

# SOUTH COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Thursday, October 29, 2015

## Latest figures show nearly 11 percent of South County children live in poverty

**By Chris Church**

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Nearly 97 percent of children in the state had health insurance coverage last year – which ranks the state seventh highest in the country. But nearly 20 percent of children here live in poverty – ranking 26th in the nation according to the Census Bureau's recently released 2014 American Community Survey. The data was gathered during the first year in which the Affordable Healthcare Act was implemented.

The data was not broken down by towns, but in Washington County, 10.9 percent of families with children under the age of 18 earned annual income that is less than the federal poverty level. That figure was up from 3.8 percent in 2010.

In 2014, the federal poverty level is household annual income of \$19,073 for a family of three with two children and \$24,008 for a family of four with two children.

Of the 125,753 residents in Washington County, 94.4 percent had health insurance; 5.6 percent were without it. Of that total population, there were 22,924 residents under the age of 18 and 2.4 percent of those children were without health coverage.

According to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT – a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of the state's children, children who have health insurance coverage are healthier and have fewer preventable hospitalizations. They are more likely to receive preventive care, be screened for the achievement of developmental milestones, miss fewer days of school and get treatment for illnesses and chronic conditions. Uninsured children are less likely to have established relationships with doctors and other providers, and have fewer visits to doctors or

dentists.

"These data show that our long-standing commitment to covering Rhode Island children is paying off," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director. "There is more good news for Rhode Island children and families – our Rite Care program was recently ranked best in the country for quality of care. Rhode Island is leading the country in delivering high quality care, and we need to continue to make this worthwhile investment in the health of our children and families."

According to KIDS COUNT, children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods, are more likely to have physical and behavioral health problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less or be unemployed as adults.

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