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### State Ranks No. 5 For Taking Care Of Kids

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Connecticut ranks No. 5 in the nation for child well-being in a study published today by the Foundation for Child Development.

Not bad, considering our national glacial-slow recovery. (New Jersey ranked No. 1, while New Mexico ranked last.)

The study from the New York-based organization is divided into 28 indicators of child well-being, including the percentage of insurance coverage (94.5 percent in the Nutmeg State), and the number of fourth-graders reading at or above proficiency level (42 percent), among others. The study includes a battle cry – "high state taxes are better for children" – that's bound to rankle a public anxious to lower taxes.

"It's not our intention to be popular, said Ruby Takanishi, president of the foundation, with which The Annie E. Casey Foundation funded the study. "I think the study is important exactly because we're going in the opposite direction in terms of public investments in children and families."

Child advocates say Connecticut's relatively high ranking comes from a combination of bipartisan political will, and a multitude of initiatives that focus on child well-being, from a legislative task force that focuses on the recession's effect on children to a 10-year plan geared to lowering child poverty by 50 percent by 2014.

"What's interesting about this report is that some of the indicators and some of their recommendations align perfectly with our state," said Elaine Zimmerman, executive director of Connecticut Commission on Children. "We did not reduce taxes. In fact, we increased them.

"We're the only state that when the recession hit, we created a children and the recession task force — that was bipartisan — to study the impact, and we built our findings into our policy practice, and into our budget. We maximized as much as we could. I think there's been really thoughtful and penetrating conversations and policy discourse on prevention for our children over the last two decades."

On the other hand, Zimmerman said the report does not look at the differences among races, and in that area, she said, "our state needs significant work."

Also, the state may have overlooked an obvious revenue stream — Connecticut corporations.

"We say consistently that an adequate revenue system that supports infrastructures that support kids is good," said Jamey Bell, executive director of Connecticut Voices for Children. In most states — including Connecticut — that means healthy revenues coming from taxes, mostly from individuals.

"We're pretty good at asking individuals to pay," said Bell, "but we're not as great as we could be about asking businesses and corporations."

An Ernst & Young report ranked Connecticut's business tax burden — including state and local taxes — the country's lowest in 2010. Recently, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy created a task force to look at business tax policy. According to Wade Gibson, Voices senior policy fellow, "There's lots of evidence to suggest that corporate income tax is falling." The public worrying about asking corporations to pay their share is similar to, said Gibson, "a drunk who looks for car keys under the street light because it's easy." Making Connecticut more business-friendly goes beyond taxes.

As legislators across the country wrestle with shrunken budgets, the report is stark in its portrayal of the differences among states for child well-being, said Takanishi.

"There are such differences among the states in children's well-being," she said. "I would say, 'Are we the United States?'"

The results come from pre-recession, 2007 data, the latest date for which all the data are available.