



Virginia KIDS COUNT on Single Parents

Single parenting is a fact of life for many Virginians. According to the 2000 Census data for Virginia, there were 275,523 single parent families with children under 18 years of age. For some, single parenthood is a conscious choice, while for others it occurs as a result of the death of a spouse or divorce. Virginia's divorce rate continues at approximately 50% and 30% of all births in 2001 were to single women.

Single parents face all the same challenges of parenting that married couples do, without its financial advantages. While many married couples make the choice for one parent to care for the children at home, single parents usually have no choice but to be in the labor force. Public sentiment supports the notion that single parents work to support themselves and their children, as evidenced from the recent changes to the welfare system.

The financial impact of single parenting is especially significant on single mothers. The financial obstacles faced by single mothers are likely not reflected in labels based upon the federal poverty threshold. The formula for the federal poverty threshold, developed on the basis of a family's food budget, has remained constant for almost 40 years and fails to consider variables such as geographic variations, housing costs, taxes, child care and health care costs. Instead, a more realistic measure is the Self-Sufficiency Standard of Virginia, which calculates the income a family needs in order to purchase basic goods and services without public or private assistance. Self sufficiency is dependent on the regional costs of several factors that individuals at moderate or higher income levels may take for granted, such as access to and coverage of health care, reliable and accessible transportation to and from one's employment, safe and adequate housing, and reliable, quality child care.

In Virginia:

The number of children who live in single-parent households has increased 4.1% from 1990 to 2000, placing Virginia 32nd in the country.

About 1 in 5 children under 6 years lives with their mother only (n. 107,037), while only 1 in 18 lives with their father only (n. 29,364).

Approximately 1 in 3 children living in single-mother households lives below poverty, compared with almost 1 in 7 children living in single-father households.

The median income for families with children under age 18
 All families is \$51,970
 Single-fathers is \$31,274
 Single-mothers is \$21,602

Families with children under 18 years living below poverty:
 Married-couples:
 4% (n. 28,033)
 Single-father families:
 13% (n. 7,650)
 Single-mother families:
 30% (n. 63,280)

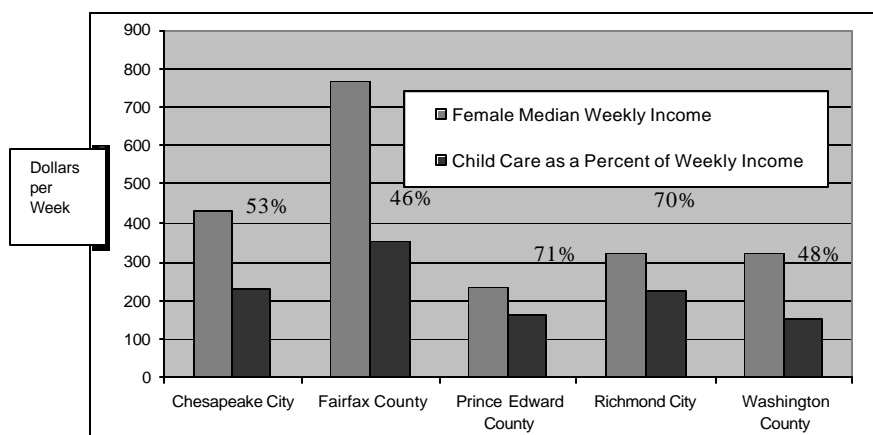
Table 1. Hourly Wage Needed to Reach Self-Sufficiency in Selected Localities in Virginia

	Hourly wage needed by a single adult with one infant & one preschooler	Hourly wage needed by each parent in a 2 parent family with one infant & one preschooler
Chesapeake City	\$15.74	\$9.32
Fairfax County	\$23.50	\$13.25
Prince Edward County	\$10.20	\$7.39
Richmond City	\$16.34	\$9.67
Washington County	\$10.33	\$7.49
Federal Poverty Threshold:	\$6.97 (total earned per hour)	\$8.77 (total earned per hour)
Minimum Wage: \$5.15		

Source: Self Sufficiency Standard for Virginia, July 2002

Child Care Concerns

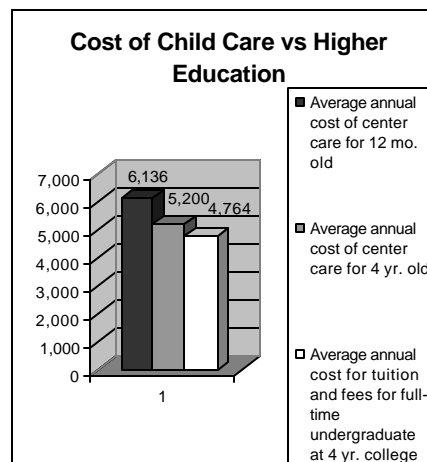
Thirty-four percent (34%) of children under age 6 are in paid child care while their parents work. For low-income families, child care costs are a significant burden. Low income families spend a larger proportion of their income on child care than do middle and upper income families. Nationally, in 2001 among working poor families headed by married couples, 23% spent more than half of their cash income on child care, while another 21% spent between 40% and



50%.¹ The burden of child care costs is even greater for single mothers. Forty percent (40%) spent at least half of their cash income on child care, while one in four single mothers spent 40% to 50%.² In Virginia, a single mother with an infant and preschooler living in the city of Roanoke and earning the median income for female-headed households could expect to pay approximately 66% of her income for child care. Additional examples for a single mother with an infant and preschooler are illustrated here.

In fact, child care tuition in Virginia is comparable to the cost of tuition and fees at a Virginia institution of higher learning as an in-state student. The financial burden of college tuition is recognized and legitimized through the availability of student financial aid, including government grants. Despite the recognition of the important role a child's early learning has on school readiness, minimal assistance is available to working families struggling to pay for quality child care.

The reality is that parents cannot work without reliable child care, nor can low-income parents afford to pay a majority of their income for child care. Child care subsidies are available to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients who are working, transitioning off TANF or families at risk of becoming dependent on TANF and to low-income working parents who do not receive TANF assistance. However, in Virginia only 7% of parents who are income-eligible actually receive child care assistance. Child care is a work support that is critical to the continued employment of many parents. As more parents move off welfare into low-paying jobs, work supports such as child care subsidies will become even more essential.



Next Steps

- To allow parents access to high quality options and serve more families, adequately fund child care subsidies.
- To help parents earn a self-sufficient wage, provide opportunities for education and training for low skill workers.
- To assist parents in maintaining employment, improve access to child care and other work supports such as health care, housing assistance and transportation subsidies.

Sources:¹ Wertheimer, R. (2003, May) Poor Families in 2001: Parents working less and children continue to lag behind (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.¹ ID U.S. Census, 2000

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