

California, Nevada two of the worst states for homeless children

By Marisol Bello, USA Today

One in 45 children in the United States – 1.6 million children – were living on the street, in homeless shelters or motels, or doubled up with other families last year, according to the National Center on Family Homelessness.

The numbers represent a 33 percent increase from 2007, when there were 1.2 million homeless children, according to a report the center is releasing Tuesday.

“This is an absurdly high number,” says Ellen Bassuk, president of the center. “What we have new in 2010 is the effects of a man-made disaster caused by the economic recession. ... We are seeing extreme budget cuts, foreclosures and a lack of affordable housing.”

The report paints a bleaker picture than one by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which nonetheless reported a 28 percent increase in homeless families, from 131,000 in 2007 to 168,000 in 2010.

Dennis Culhane, a University of Pennsylvania professor of social policy, says HUD’s numbers are much smaller because they count only families living on the street or in emergency shelters.

“It is a narrower standard of homelessness,” he says. However, Culhane says, “the bottom line is we’ve shown an increase in the percentage of homeless families.”

The study, a state-by-state report card, looks at four years’ worth of Education Department data. It assesses how homeless

children fare based on factors including the state's wages, poverty and foreclosure rates, cost of housing and its programs for homeless families.

The states where homeless children fare the best are Vermont, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and Maine.

It finds the worst states for homeless children are Southern states where poverty is high, including Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas, and states decimated by foreclosures and job losses, such as Arizona, California and Nevada.

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