

Testimony Supporting:

Committee Bill 344, *An Act Concerning Family Prosperity and the Recommendations of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council*

Testimony of Douglas Hall, Ph.D.¹,
To the Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2008

Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and members of the committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a statewide, independent, research-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children and youth in the policy making process that has such a great impact on their lives.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports Committee Bill 344, ***An Act Concerning Family Prosperity and the Recommendations of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council***. Connecticut Voices for Children has a long history of fighting child and family poverty in Connecticut. The original report of the Child Poverty Council drew heavily on our work, including references to our annual *State of Working Connecticut* report, which makes clear the connection between the Connecticut economy, the well-being of working families, and child poverty. We know, for example, that wages for Connecticut's low and very low wage workers have been in decline. Wages for Connecticut's very low wage earners (those at the 10th percentile) declined from 2002 to 2006, while low wages (those at the 20th percentile) declined from 2001 to 2006.² In the face of such wage erosion, it should be no surprise that Connecticut has failed to make substantial progress towards the Child Poverty and Prevention Council's targeted 50% reduction in child poverty by 2014.

To the credit of the Council, recent progress has been made to prioritize the Council's work, honing in on 13 priority areas, culled from the original 67 recommendations of the Council. These priorities were reached after consulting with a diverse panel of national experts on child poverty.

Committee Bill 344, if enacted, would establish local pilot programs to implement strategies to reverse child poverty in furtherance of the state's goal to reduce child poverty by fifty per cent by the year 2014. Up to five priority school district municipalities would be eligible for funding.

Connecticut Voices for Children applauds the objective of this legislation, to pursue multisectoral support for reduction of child poverty at the community level. Involving public, private, and non-profit sectors will be critical to the success of this initiative. Requiring the active leadership of the educational sector is also critical, as is the decision to incorporate community and neighborhood participation. Truly, the issue of child poverty is sufficiently complex that the engagement of *all sectors* will be required to achieve the goal of 50% reduction of child poverty.³

¹ Dr. Hall is the Associate Research Director at Connecticut Voices for Children.

² Joachim Hero, Douglas Hall and Shelley Geballe, *The State of Working Connecticut, 2007*, (CT Voices for Children, 2007).

³ It is important to draw attention to the recommendation of the 'expert panel' that alternative measures of poverty be developed and relied upon. The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is woefully inadequate as a measure of what it costs to get

While we support any effort to reduce child poverty in Connecticut, we have some concerns that this legislation reinforces the incorrect perception that child poverty in Connecticut is primarily a ‘big city’ problem. Attached to this testimony are maps which highlight two compelling facts about child poverty in Connecticut.

On one hand, the first six maps highlight the fact that Connecticut’s big cities contain significant concentrations of very high child poverty. The first of the statewide maps shows that nearly a quarter of Connecticut’s child poverty population live in Census block groups where the child poverty rate exceeds 50%.

On the other hand, the following three statewide maps highlight the fact that Connecticut’s child poverty population is scattered through much of the state. The fourth statewide map shows Census block groups where the child poverty rate exceeds 15%. Fully three quarters of Connecticut’s child poverty population lives in such block groups, located in dozens of Connecticut cities and towns.

The final series of three statewide maps reinforces these two dimensions of Connecticut child poverty. While it’s true that Census 2000 results show 54% of Connecticut’s child poverty population concentrated in five of Connecticut’s poorest cities, it is similarly true that nearly half – 46% – of Connecticut’s child poverty population *does not* live in those five large Connecticut cities. Twenty-five percent of Connecticut’s child poverty lives in sixteen of Connecticut’s smaller cities.

Child poverty in Connecticut IS a big city problem, but it is also a problem in smaller cities and in rural Connecticut. Addressing child poverty in Connecticut will require strategic targeting of limited resources, as seen in Committee Bill 344, but it will also require an understanding that *everyone* in the wealthiest state in the wealthiest nation of the world has a stake in ensuring that the basic needs and dignity of every Connecticut child are protected, and that every child is given the opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of their socio-economic background.

by today. Responding to the release of new poverty data in August 2007, Annie E Casey President, Douglas Nelson, noted that “the poverty figure itself is deeply flawed and almost comically out of date” in “Counting what counts: a better way to define poverty”, *Washington Times*, (August 29, 2007). The Connecticut Office for Workforce Competitiveness’s *Self-Sufficiency Report* (2006) quantifies the real costs faced by parents raising children in Connecticut – and shows that economic self-sufficiency requires a much higher annual income than the federal poverty level. For example, full time, year round, minimum wage employment provides *less than half* of what it really costs for a parent to support two children in Waterbury D. Pearce, *The Real Cost of Living in 2005: The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Connecticut*, (CT General Assembly, Office of Workforce Competitiveness, December 2005), available at: http://www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw/Publications/Self_SufficiencyCT05%20Full%20Report_12_13_05.pdf.

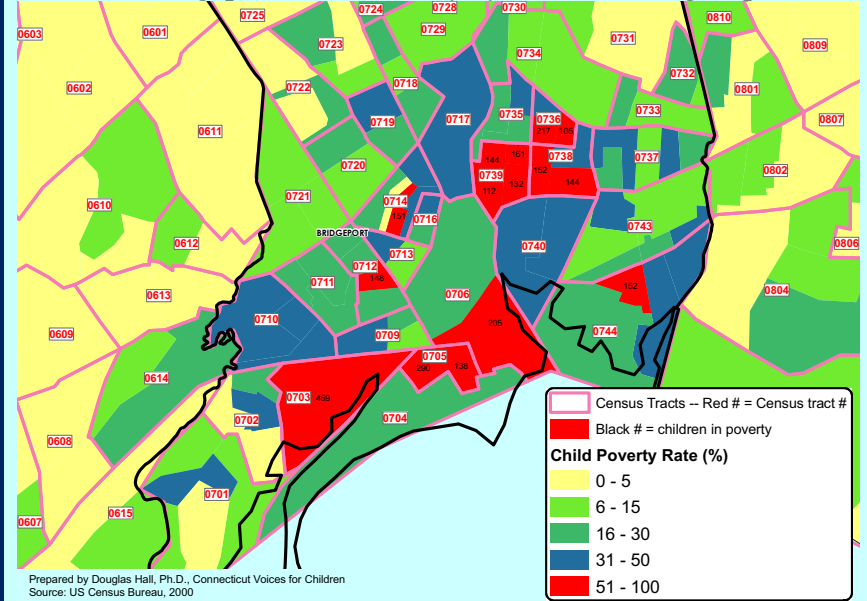


Child Poverty in Connecticut: Concentrated Urban Poverty AND Non Urban Poverty

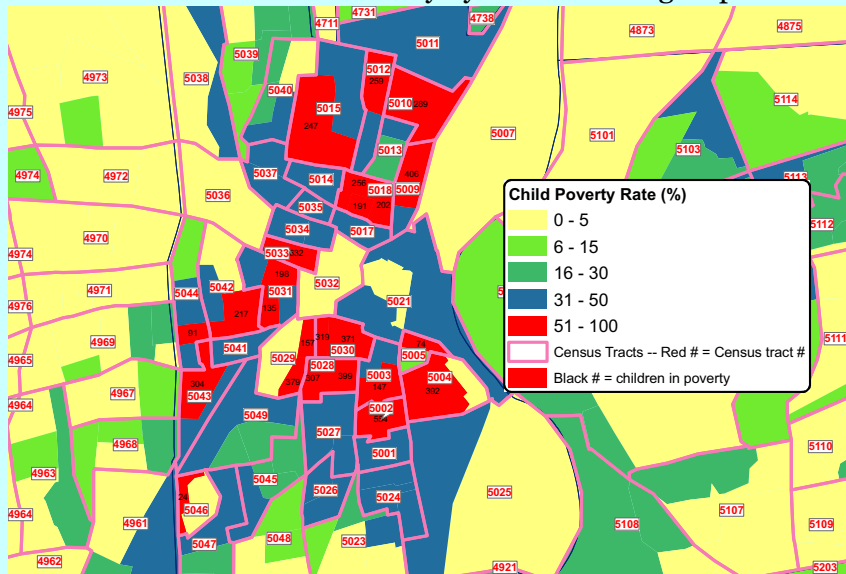
Douglas Hall, Ph.D.
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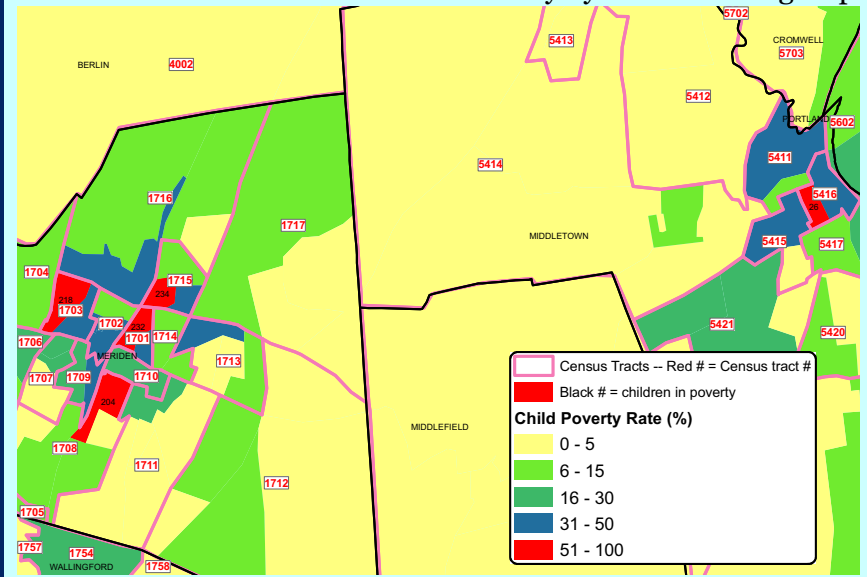
Bridgeport Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



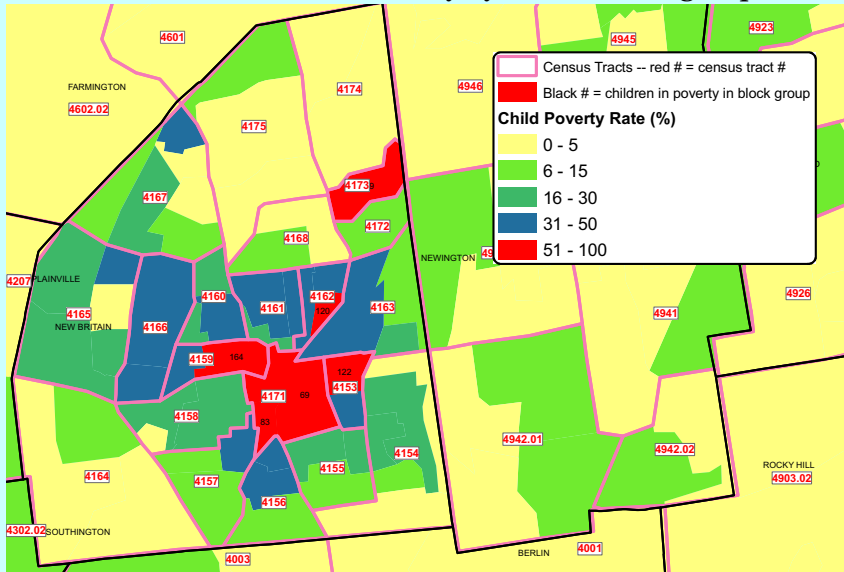
Hartford Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



Meriden and Middletown Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

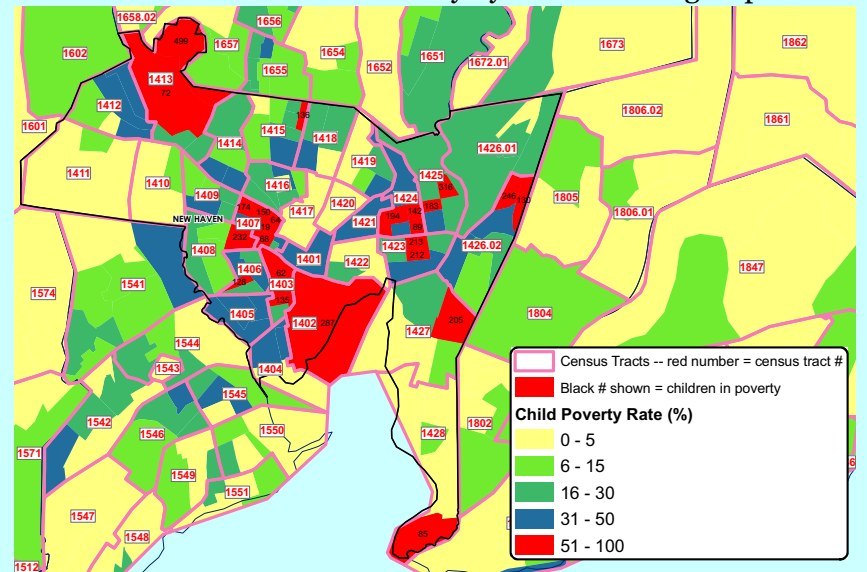


New Britain Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



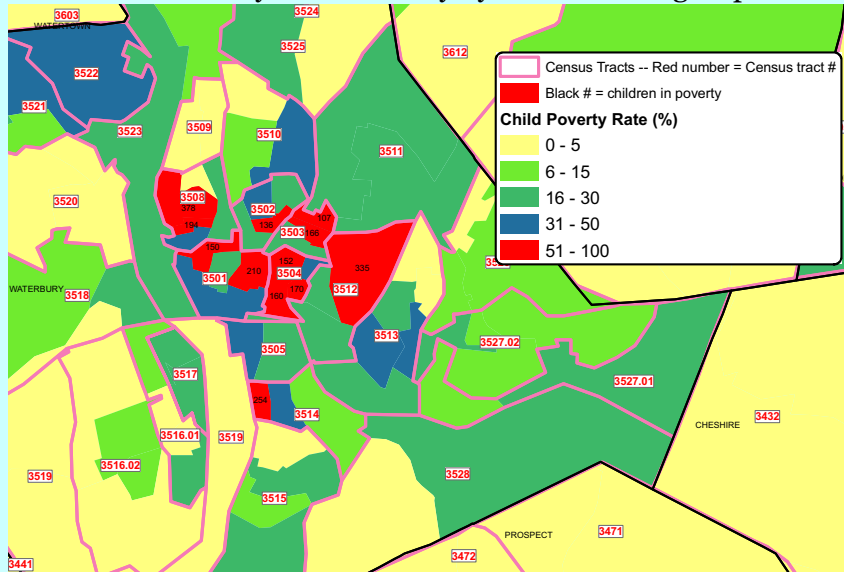
Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

New Haven Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

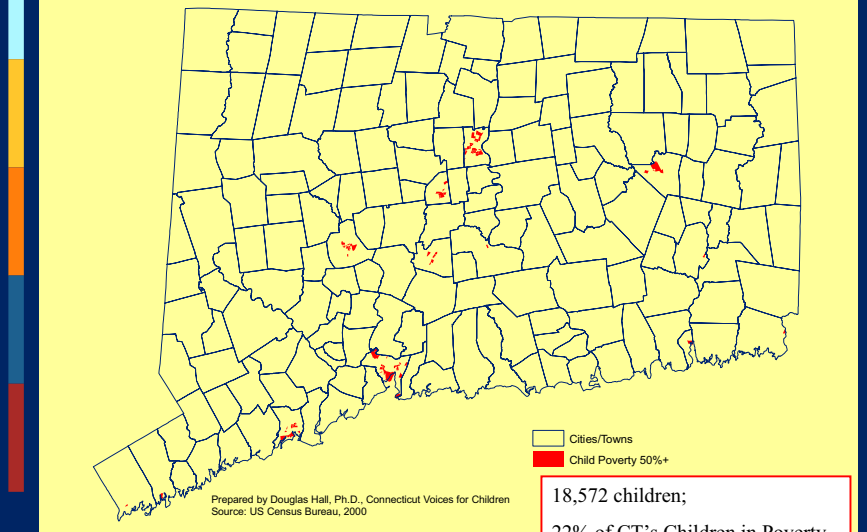
Waterbury Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

Child Poverty > 50%

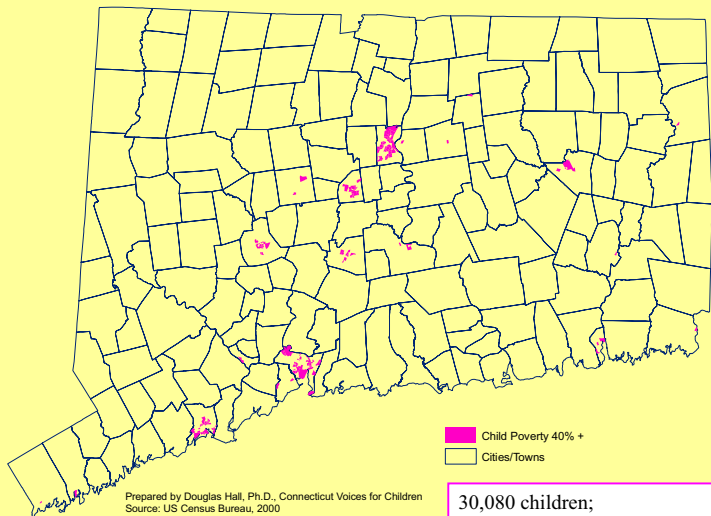


Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

18,572 children;
22% of CT's Children in Poverty

Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

Child Poverty > 40%

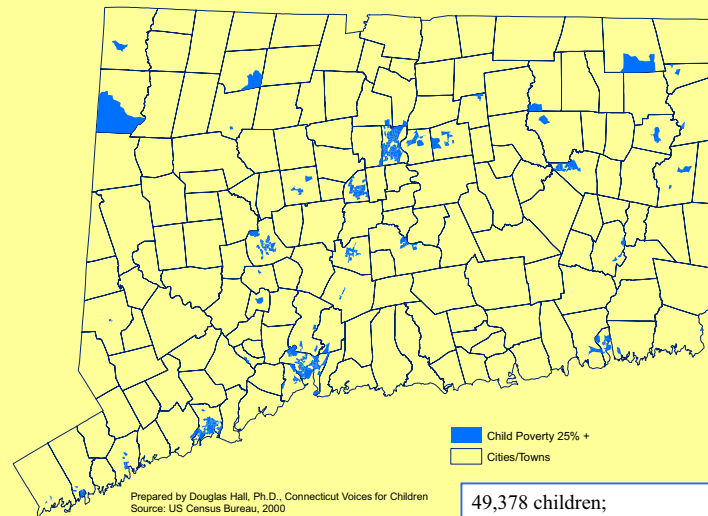


Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

30,080 children;
35% of CT's Children in Poverty

Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

Child Poverty > 25%

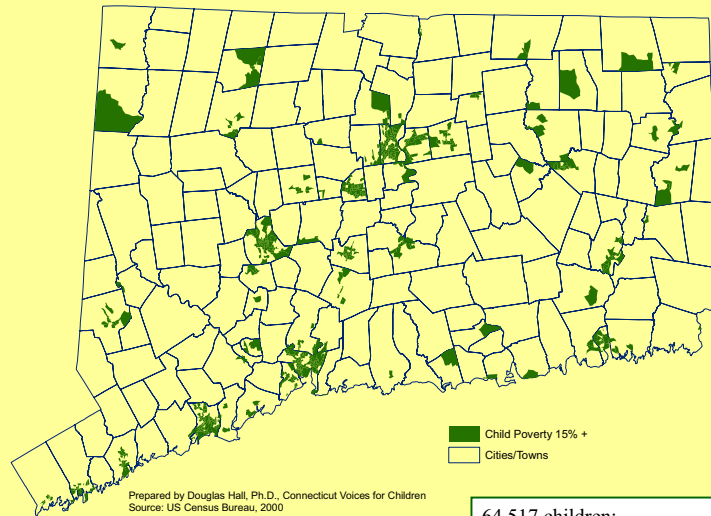


Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

49,378 children;
57% of CT's Children in Poverty

Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

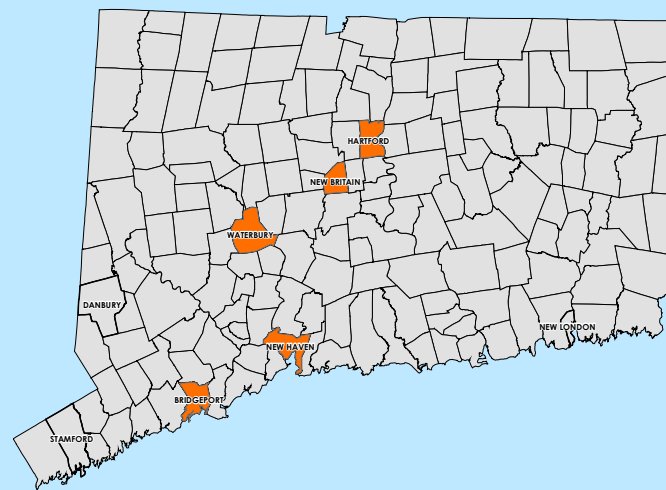
Child Poverty > 15%



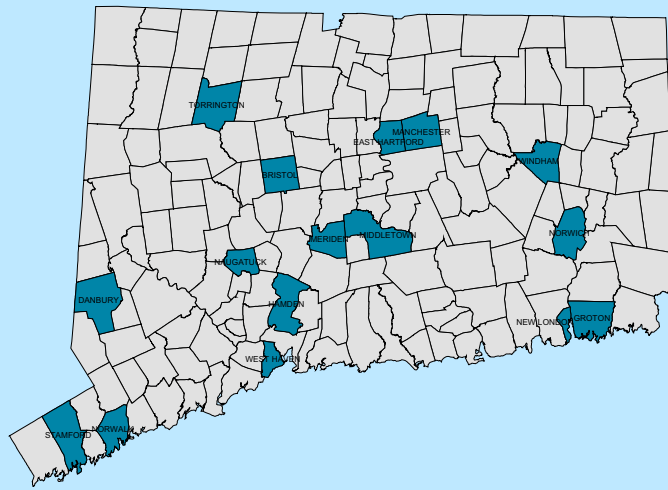
Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

64,517 children;
75% of CT's Children in Poverty

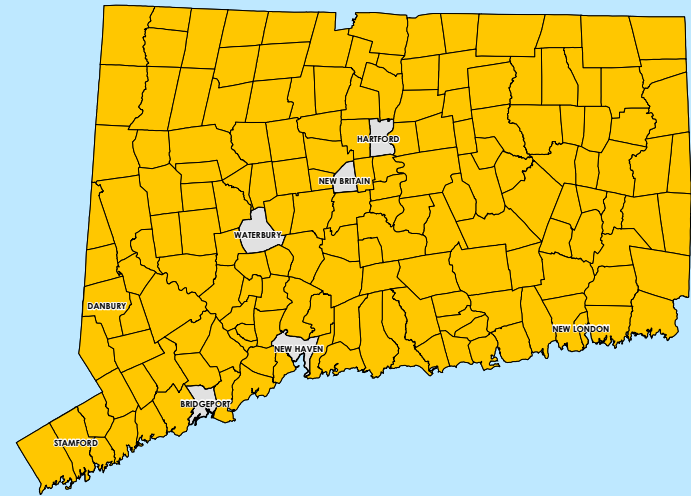
Where Do Connecticut's Poor Children Live? 54% Live In Five of CT's Largest Cities



Where Do Connecticut's Poor Children Live?
25% Live Here



Where Do Connecticut's Poor Children Live?
46% DON'T Live In Five of CT's Largest Cities



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