

**Testimony Supporting:**

**Senate Bill 666, *An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty***

Testimony of Douglas Hall, Ph.D,<sup>1</sup>  
To the Committee on Human Services  
March 11, 2008

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and Members of the Committee:

I testify 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 strongly supports Senate Bill 666, *An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty*. This bill proposes concrete, strategic measures aimed at reducing child poverty in Connecticut.**

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 10<sup>th</sup> percentile) declined from 2002 to 2006, while low wages (those at the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile) declined from 2001 to 2006.<sup>2</sup> 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 their credit, the *Child Poverty and Prevention Council January 2008 Progress Report* identifies three target populations, and identifies, based on the advice of a panel of national experts on child poverty, a number of priority areas focusing on four substantive groupings of the policies:

1. family income and earnings potential;
2. education;
3. income safety net; and
4. family structure and support.<sup>3</sup>

The Council further committed to review 'alternative measures of poverty', and to ensure that the Child Poverty and Prevention Council proceed within the framework of the state's Results Based Accountability (RBA) process, coordinated by the Charter Oak Group. We look forward to working with this Committee and the Child Poverty and Prevention Council as you pursue each of these measures. We recognize that the **existing federal poverty level is woefully inadequate as a measure of family well-being.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hall is the Associate Research Director at Connecticut Voices for Children.

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

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Genuaurio, Secretary of Office of Policy and Management and Chair of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council, *Child Poverty and Prevention Council January 2008 Progress Report*, (Child Poverty and Prevention Council, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> 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

Senate Bill 666 proposes pursuing a broad range of policy options consistent with the current thinking of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. Specifically, the bill supports:

1. a **fatherhood initiative** encouraging positive involvement of low income fathers in their children’s lives;
2. a grant program supporting the **educational and career outcomes of minority young men**;
3. a program aimed at **increasing the participation rates in the food stamp program**;
4. programs aimed at **reducing teen pregnancy and preparing youth for college, employment, and citizenship**;
5. a **work readiness** initiative for first-time mothers aimed at improving literacy skills and educational levels of first-time mothers who are exempt from the work participation requirements of the state’s temporary family assistance (TFA) program, with the intent to help both young parents and their children to maximize their **educational attainment**, which is so key to being able to achieve economic self-sufficiency (see Figure 1 below). Bill 666 states that these initiatives should “be conducted in up to five geographically targeted neighborhoods”. The maps in the attached presentation identify those Census Bureau Block Groups with very high concentrations of child poverty. A major focus of this initiative is to ensure that **existing programs** (such as the Nurturing Families Network, the Healthy Start program, the “Jobs First” program and the HUSKY program) **be coordinated**.

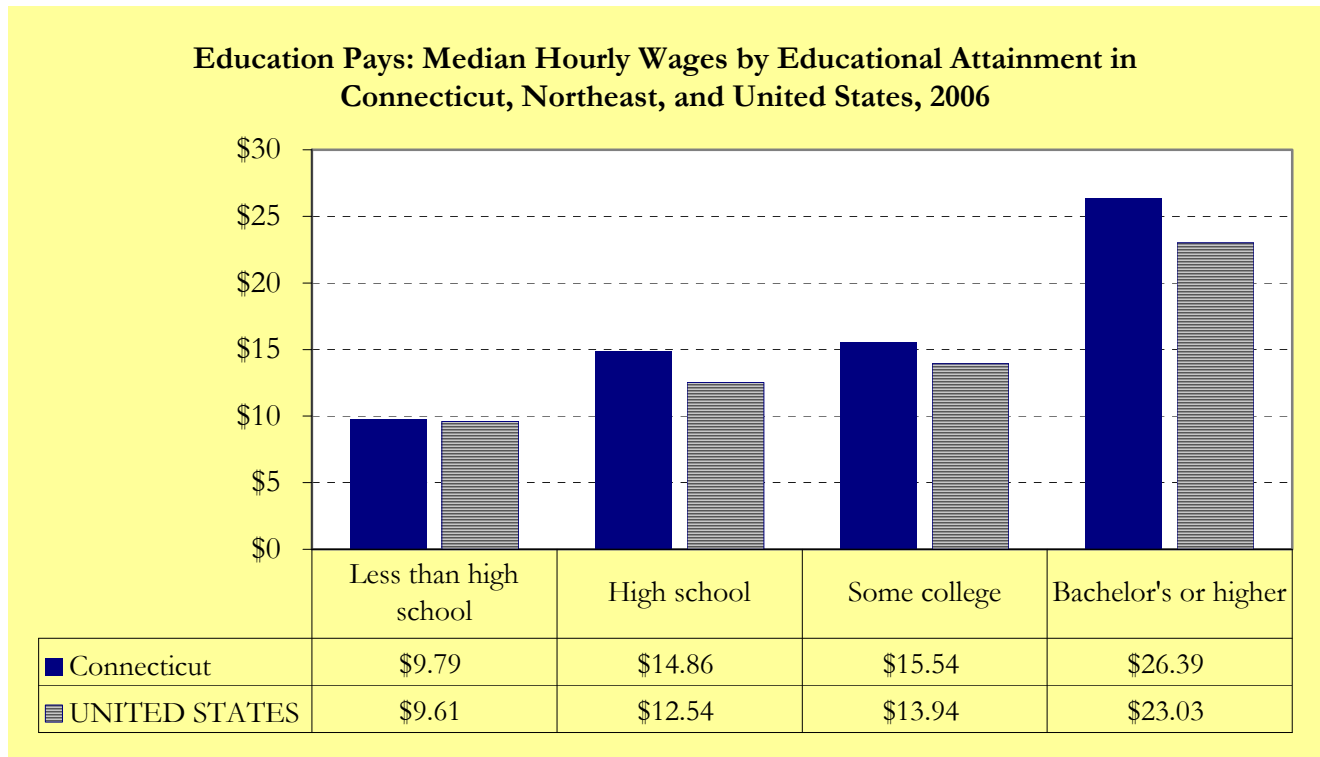


Figure 1: Source, *The State of Working Connecticut, 2007*, (Connecticut Voices for Children).

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](http://www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw/Publications/Self_SufficiencyCT05%20Full%20Report_12_13_05.pdf).

6. increased funds for the **'birth to three' system;**
7. increased funds for the **kinship navigator** program.

Many of the initiatives recommended in Senate Bill 666 are to be achieved through grants to municipalities. While Connecticut Voices for Children recognizes the need for all levels of government to work together to achieve child poverty reduction, we caution against assuming that Connecticut's child poverty program is just a problem of Connecticut's larger urban areas. **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 Senate Bill 666, 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.

Thank-you for the opportunity to testify today. We look forward to working with this committee to reduce child poverty in Connecticut.

[See Attachment: *Child Poverty in Connecticut: Concentrated Urban Poverty AND Non Urban Poverty*]

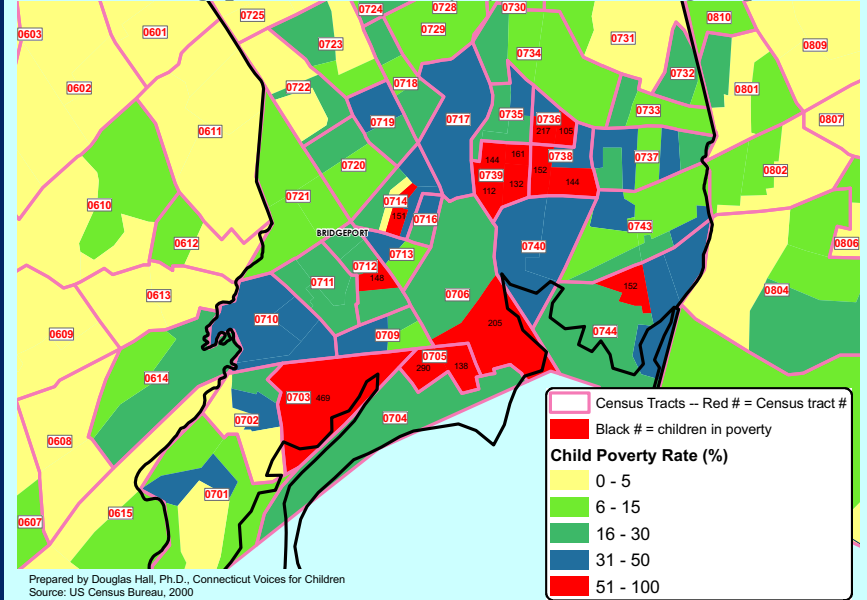


# Child Poverty in Connecticut: Concentrated Urban Poverty AND Non Urban Poverty

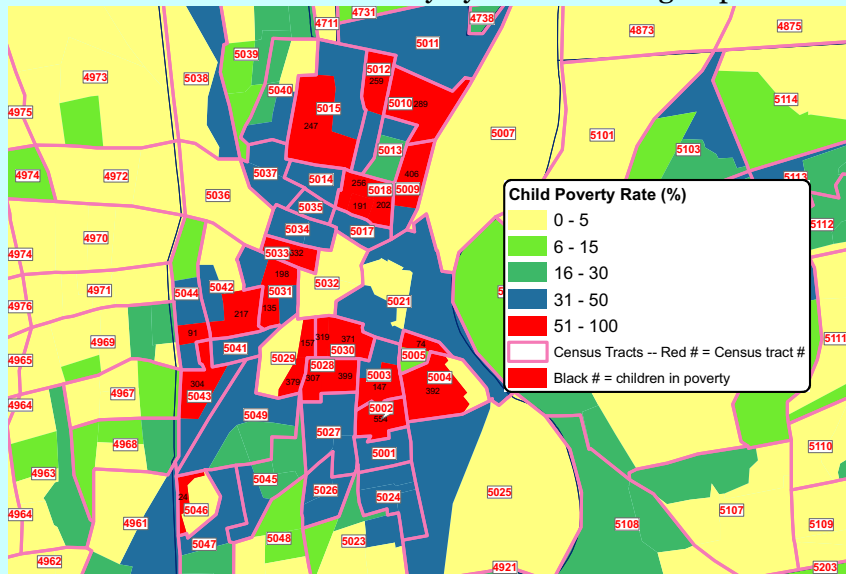
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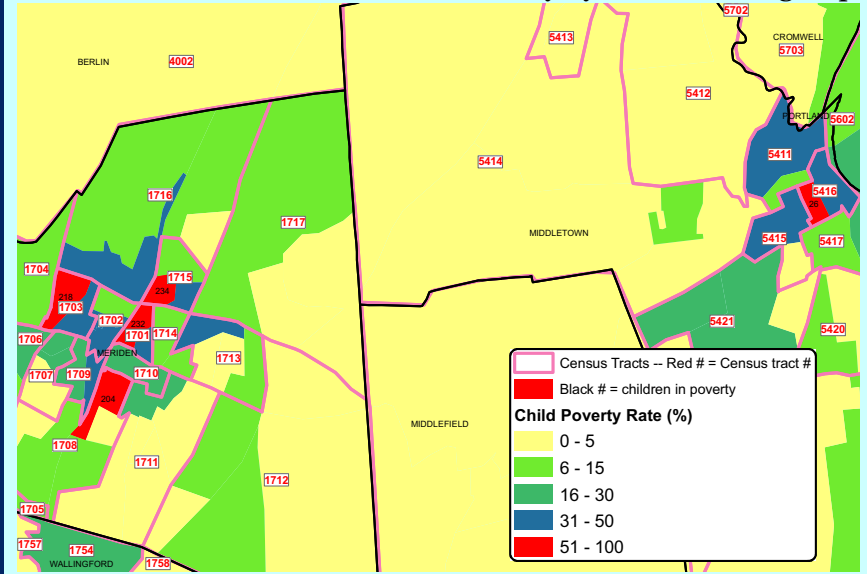
## Bridgeport Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



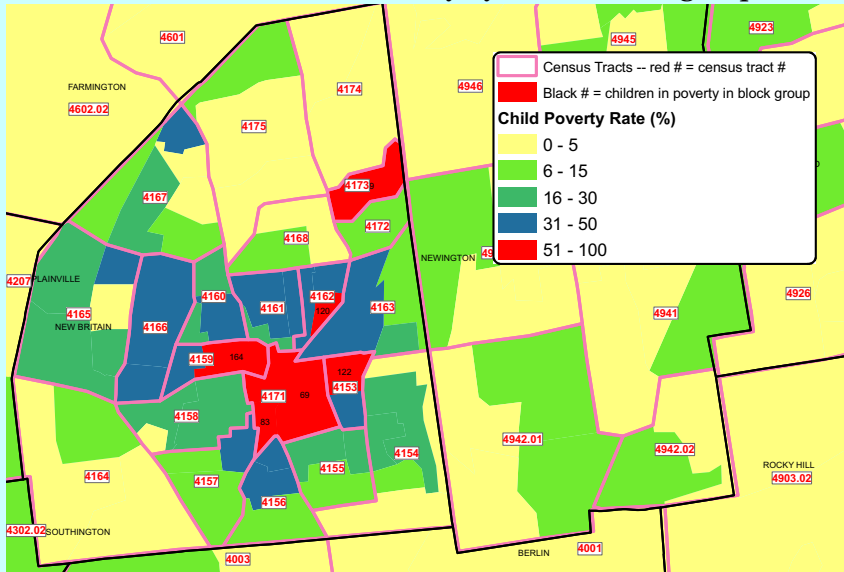
## Hartford Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



## Meriden and Middletown Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

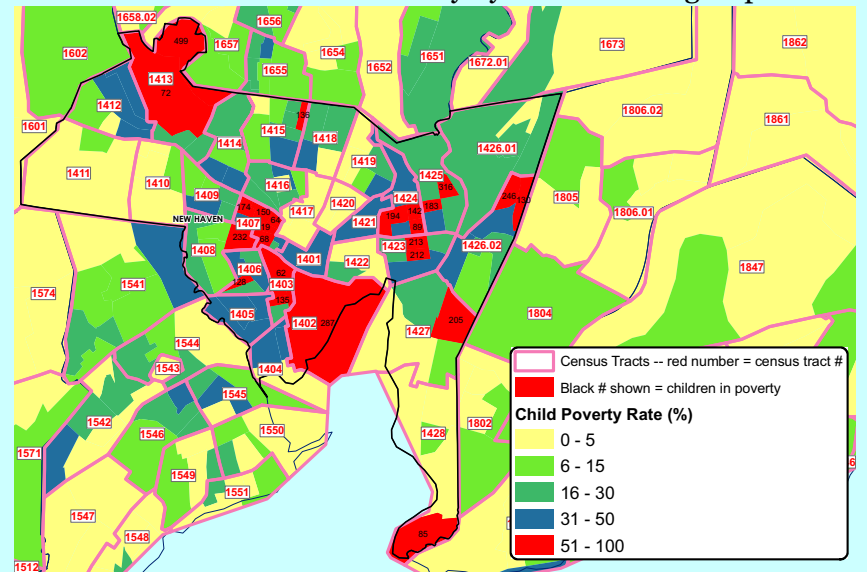


### New Britain Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



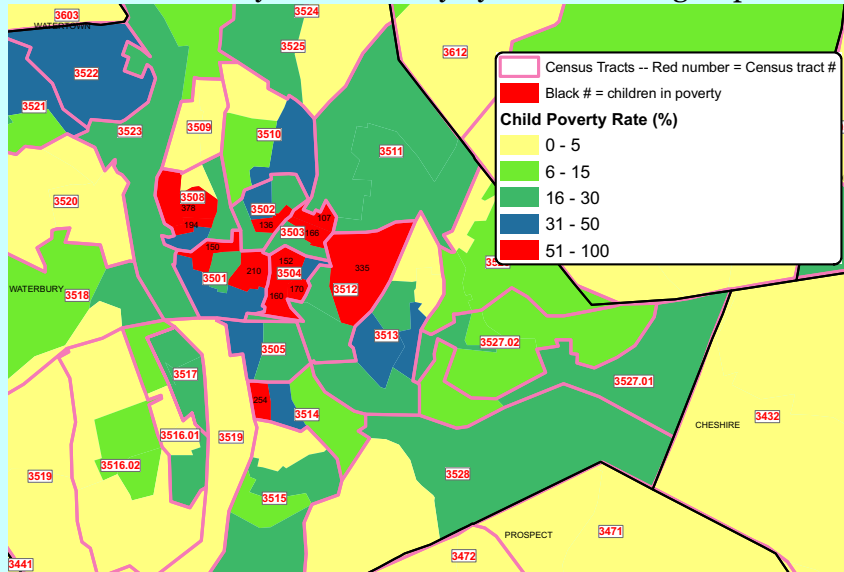
Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children  
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

### New Haven Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



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

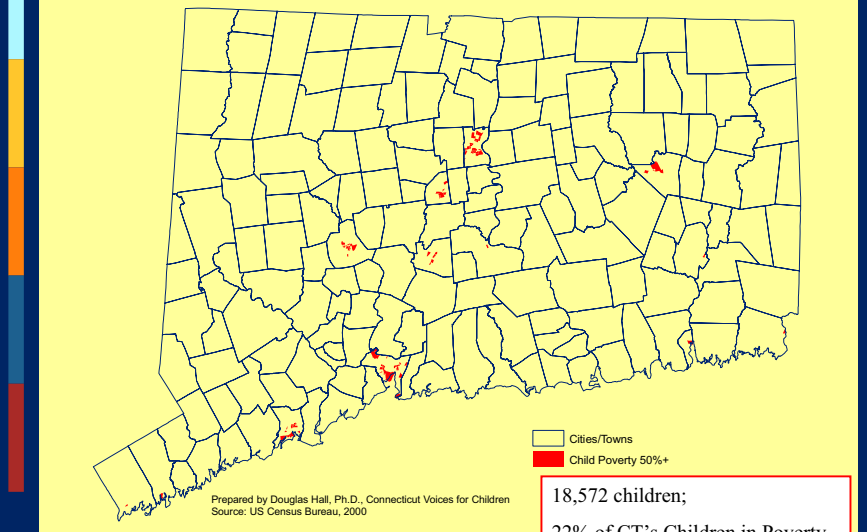
### Waterbury Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup



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

### Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

Child Poverty > 50%

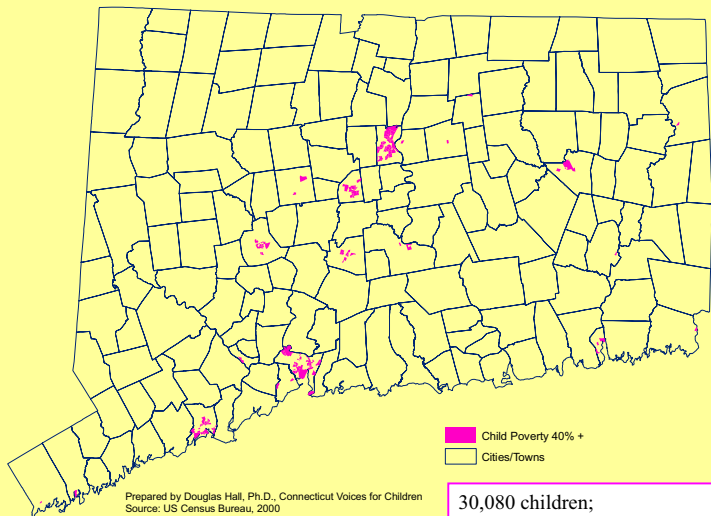


Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children  
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

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

### Child Poverty by Census Blockgroup

Child Poverty > 40%



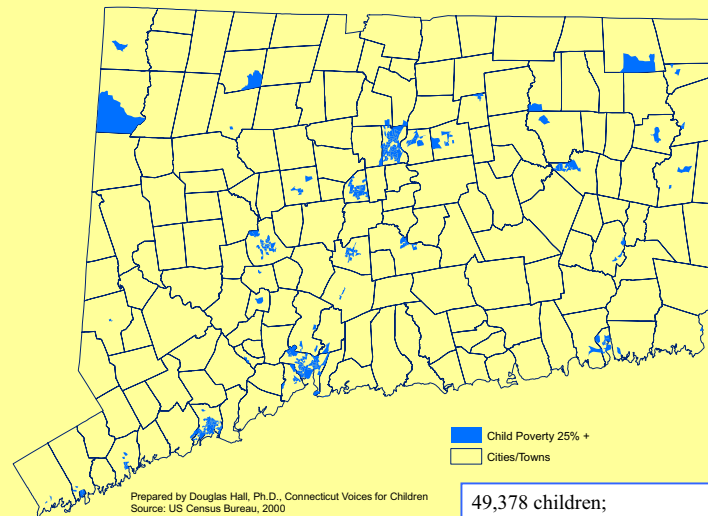
Child Poverty 40% +  
Cities/Towns

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%



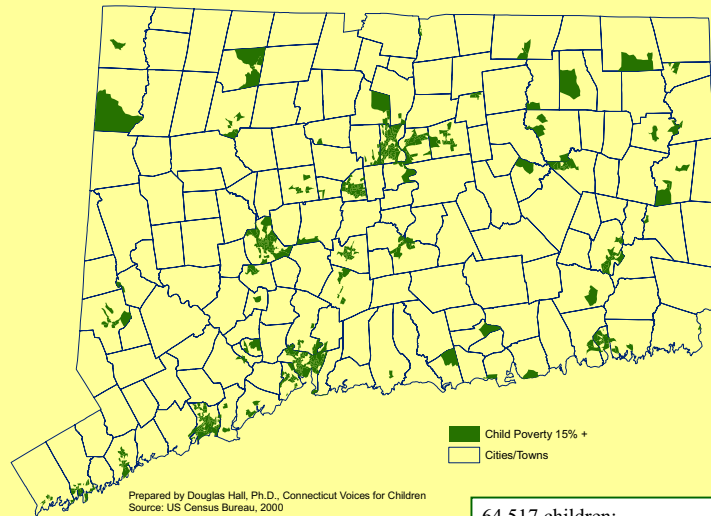
Child Poverty 25% +  
Cities/Towns

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%

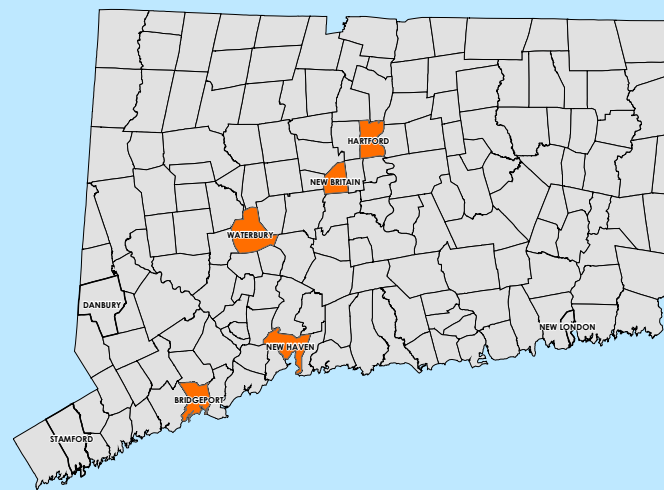


Child Poverty 15% +  
Cities/Towns

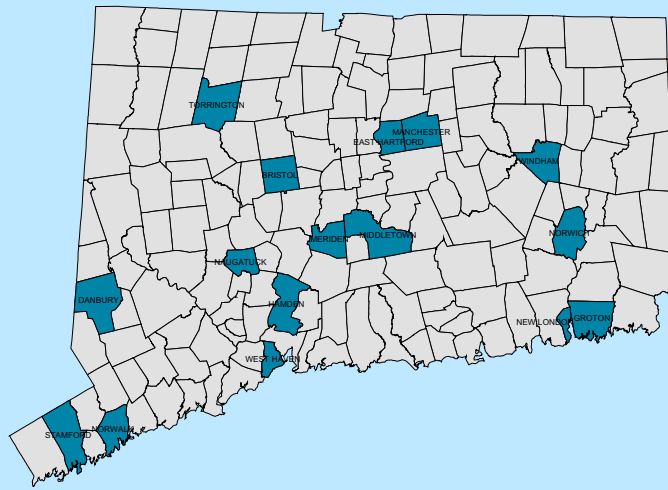
Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children  
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000

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

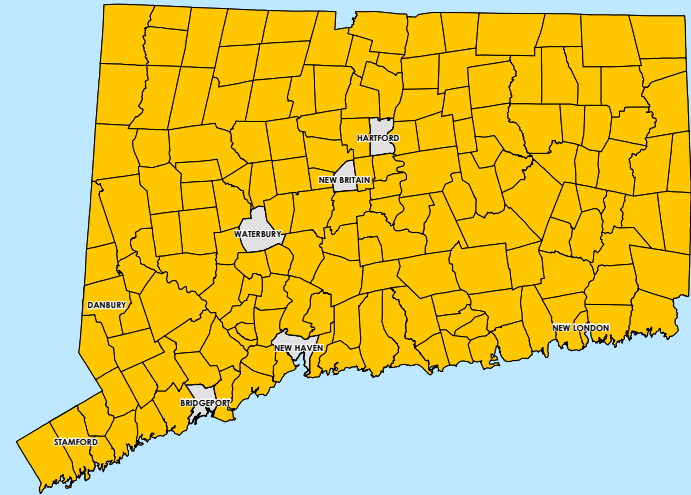
### Where Do Connecticut's Poor Children Live? 54% Live In Five of CT's Largest Cities



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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