The percentage of children in Buffalo who are poor dropped last year – by a sliver.

New data from the U.S. Census Bureau released Thursday shows that 47.3 percent of children in Buffalo grew up in poverty last year.

That's a modest decrease from 2013, when the Census Bureau revealed a majority of Buffalo's children – 50.6 percent – lived below the poverty line.

Buffalo's children remain the third-poorest in the nation among cities with populations greater than 245,000.

And despite the region's economic momentum, there is still as much concern as ever.
"You can fix up a waterfront and a downtown and a Medical Campus and not really see the benefits get spread out through the region," said Sam Magavern, co-director of the Partnership for the Public Good.

"The big challenge facing Buffalo now is: Exactly how do we leverage the good things that are happening and make sure they benefit everyone?"

In fact, Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz will unveil on Thursday another piece of his anti-poverty plan that debuted this spring.

The county executive is naming members of a committee to help steer Erie County through this issue in the future.

In Erie County, the poverty rate last year was 15.2 percent, census data showed, unchanged since 2013.

"We've been seeing for some time that there is great need among certain people in our population and it's across the entire county – not just the City of Buffalo," Poloncarz said.

**Child poverty in Buffalo on the decline**

The poverty data released Thursday shows that:

- Buffalo's poverty is holding steady. The overall poverty rate for Buffalo last year reached 31.3 percent – a number largely unchanged from the year before, but up since five years ago.

- The poverty picture in the city can be different depending on how old you are. While Buffalo children in poverty deceased in 2014, poverty rates among those over age 18 went up slightly, including among senior citizens.

In Buffalo, the poverty rate for those ages 18 to 64 was 28.3 percent, an increase from the 27.2 percent rate in 2013.

Among those 65 and older, the rate was 17.3 percent last year, up from 16.2 in 2013.

- There is a disparity between genders.

The numbers of men and women living in poverty in Erie County were largely unchanged in 2014 from the year before. The rate of men living in poverty in the county was 14 percent. Among women in the county, the poverty rate last year was 16.3 percent.

The disparity was larger in Buffalo – 34 percent of women were living in poverty last year, compared
• Rural poverty varied. In counties surrounding Buffalo, poverty rates for 2014 included an overall poverty rate of 13.2 percent in Niagara County, where the child poverty rate was 15.4 percent.

In Chautauqua County, 28.7 percent of those younger than 18 were living in poverty in 2014, while the overall poverty rate was 19.8 percent.

In Cattaraugus County, the poverty rate for all ages last year was 15.8 percent. The rate of children in Cattaraugus living in poverty last year was 20.6 percent.

• A greater percentage of high school graduates were living in poverty last year. In Erie County, slightly more people with high school degrees or some college education were living in poverty last year compared with 2013.

The poverty rate for high school graduates in the county went from 12.7 percent in 2013 to 13.9 percent last year. Among those with some college, it went from 10.8 percent in 2013 to 11.7 percent last year.

For college graduates in Erie County, the rate dropped a bit last year, to 4.3 percent, from the year before.

For those in Erie County with an education less than a high school diploma, the poverty rate in 2014 was 30.2 percent, down from 31.8 percent in 2013.

• There continues to be a sharp divide in poverty rates among races.

"It's not that we're a high poverty region – we're pretty average," Magavern said. "What's unusual is that sharp distinction between the city and the rest of the region and the disparity between the races."

For example, in Buffalo, 20 percent of whites are living in poverty.

That's compared to 36 percent of blacks who are considered poor; 38 percent of Asians and 56 percent of Hispanics.

The contrast is even more stark across Erie County, where 9 percent of whites are poor.

Compare that with 31 percent of Asians, 43 percent of Hispanics and 33 percent of blacks.

"Part of our message is that if we want better schools, if we want better health, if we want safer neighborhoods, we have to address poverty head-on," Magavern said, "so we have to find ways to raise people's income and cut their expenses. It's simpler than it sometimes seems."

On the income side, Magavern said, that means pushing for living-wage policies. On the expense side, that means investing more in affordable housing programs and public transportation.

As for the childhood poverty numbers in Buffalo, Magavern said, anyone who sees those numbers understands the region's central city can't be successful with poverty rates so high. But there's a myth that all kids need is a good education to get out of poverty, Magavern said.

"The kids aren't going to succeed without their parents succeeding," Magavern said.

While education is crucial, he said, it's not the only issue.

Single mothers face a particular challenge.

In 2014, 27 percent of those who experienced homelessness were children younger than 18, said Dale Zuchlewski, executive director of the Homeless Alliance of Western New York.

That's 1,211 children who came through the doors of a local shelter last year, he said.
"When people think of homeless they think of the old guy pushing a shopping cart down the street," Zuchlewski said, "but a big portion entering shelters are young moms with children.

"If you are a single woman you have a 19 percent chance of living in poverty," Zuchlewski said. "If you have one or two children that number jumps to 42 percent."

It can be a cycle that repeats itself, others said.

"What we saw was generational poverty," said David Zapfel, executive director of Gerard Place, a nonprofit in the city's Bailey-Delavan neighborhood, "just one generation after another, after another after another."

The nonprofit provides transitional housing for 14 families for up to two years while they get on their feet.

"On Day One, they might come in with a couple of garbage bags. The mother might have a mental illness or a diagnosed disability. She's trying to keep her family together," Zapfel said.

"Certainly when they come to us, we would give them an apartment, and you can't miss the sense of how really safe they feel, their sense of security, because their coming to us at a time when they don't know where they'll be sleeping at night."

What Zapfel's agency found is that many of the poor it serves didn't have the funds to get to work – let alone pay for day care to look after their children.

The response from Gerard Place has been to renovate the old St. Gerard Parish hall on Bailey Avenue, where the organization can provide a workforce-development center and day care.

"What we found is a lot of people could not afford public transportation to go to where job training is," Zapfel said. "That was a real barrier to help people get out of poverty."

Poloncarz, meanwhile, has made reducing poverty a focal point of his administration in recent months.

Erie County is the primary provider of health and human services in the community and more than half of the county's $1.45 billion budget goes toward it.

"Our goal is to reduce the amount of poverty, but to also reduce the underlying reasons for why poverty exists – and that runs the gamut," the county executive said.

Supporting services that lead to a healthier population – including respite care and mental health program in schools – could save millions in Medicaid dollars, he said.

"It's little things like that," Poloncarz said.

"That doesn't seem like much, but if you can keep someone in a job and not have to take care of loved one, it's going to have an impact on poverty."

email: jrey@buffnews.com and cvogel@buffnews.com

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