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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Welcomes
Sixteenth Annual National KIDS COUNT Report on the
Status of Children in the United States, including new data on children living in
America's vulnerable households: children in households where the household head
did not finish high school, has limited English proficiency, or has a work disability.**

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PROVIDENCE, RI, July 27, 2005 – The sixteenth annual *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a state-by-state study of children's well-being issued by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, reveals that Rhode Island ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in the nation on an index of 10 key indicators (with 1<sup>st</sup> being the best and 50<sup>th</sup> being the worst). The report features data on education, health, and economic conditions, comparing the status of Rhode Island families and U.S. families. New this year, the report includes data on children living in vulnerable households.

*U.S. Children Living in Vulnerable Households*

The 2005 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides data and information on the 3.4 million children living in low-income households (defined as below 200% of the federal poverty threshold) where adults encountered difficulty connecting to the labor force. More than half of these children lived in extreme poverty (below 50% of the poverty threshold or less than \$7,340 for a family of three in 2003). Of the 3.4 million children living in low-income households where adults were not able to connect to the workforce, 80% lived in single parent households, 80% of households were headed by one of the child's parents and 15% lived in households headed by a grandparent. Children in these households were disproportionately children of color: 37% African American, 21% Latino, 3% Asian, 2% American Indian and 33% White, non-Hispanic.

Research shows that children living in households where no parent is engaged in secure employment (defined as full-time and year round) are less likely to have access to health care, stable child care, and are more likely to live in poverty. According to Douglas W. Nelson, President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "the best way to improve the future for

America's most disadvantaged kids is to improve the financial security of their parents today."

This year's essay provides recommendations for strengthening America's families by investing in job training and education, providing community supports to help parents connect to good paying jobs, and addressing barriers to employment, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, depression and prior incarceration.

The *Data Book* also provides national and state level data on various household characteristics that increase the likelihood that a child will grow up in a household facing difficulties entering and remaining in the workforce:

- 17% of U.S. children lived in a household where the household head did not finish high school or obtain a GED.
- 12% of U.S. children lived in households where the household head had limited English proficiency.
- 5% of U.S. children lived in households where the household head had a work disability.
- 2.8 million U.S. children had a special health care need that limited the employment of a family member.

#### *Rhode Island's Children Living in Vulnerable Households*

According to the 2005 *National Data Book*, 31% of the estimated 243,000 children lived in low-income families (income below 200% of federal poverty threshold). Children in low-income families are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and as adults, earn less and be unemployed more frequently.

This year's report includes data on Rhode Island households with children in which the adult(s) had difficulty connecting to the labor force in 2003. According to the 2005 *National Data Book*:

- In 2003 in Rhode Island 18% of children lived in households where the household head did not finish high school or obtain a GED and 16% of children lived in households where the household head had limited English skills. Research shows

that the level of English proficiency for parents and the level of parental educational attainment can affect the ability of adults to connect to the labor force, thereby impacting many aspects of child well-being.

- In Rhode Island, 17,010 (7%) children lived in households where the household head had a work disability and there were 9,000 (4%) children who had special health care needs that limited the employment of a family member. For many parents, having a disability or having a child with special needs can significantly impact their finances, their jobs and their family lives.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT states, “These new data indicate that for many parents, having a disability or having a child with special needs can significantly limit their connection to the workforce and have a major impact on the family’s financial security.”

#### *Child Care and Housing*

- The *Data Book* also shows that child care is a fundamental need for Rhode Island families. In 2003, 67% of children under the age of 6 had all of their parents in the labor force, higher than the national average of 60%. The availability of child care is critical for helping families find and maintain employment.
- Data also reveals that low-income families in Rhode Island face housing cost burdens. In 2003, 69% of children in low-income families (income below 200% of the federal poverty threshold) spend more than 30% of their income on housing, compared to 60% nationally. Families with cost burdens are likely to go without other basic necessities such as food, medicine and clothing in order to pay for housing.

#### *Other Indicators of Child Well-Being*

The *Data Book* also shows that nationally, five out of ten child well-being indicators worsened since 2000 (low birth-weight infants, infant mortality rate, teen death rate, children living with parents without full-time year-round employment, and children in poverty). This is in stark contrast with data in last year’s KIDS COUNT study that showed eight out of 10 key indicators improved nationally from 1996 to 2001.

In Rhode Island, four of 10 indicators improved since 2000 (child deaths for children ages 1-14, teens who are high school drop outs, children living with parents with full-time year-round employment, and children in single parent households). Rhode Island experienced declines in 5 indicators (low birth-weight babies, infant mortality rate, teen birth rate, teens not in school and not working, and children in poverty). Rates stayed the same for one indicator (teen deaths ages 15-19).

“The data in this year’s *National KIDS COUNT Data Book* point to the need for staying the course on the critical investments in housing, child care and health care. In addition, we must identify policy and systems changes that can help families facing the significant barriers to employment that are outlined in this report,” stated Ms. Bryant. “The barriers to employment faced by many parents, such as low levels of education and difficulty with English proficiency argue for increased investments in education and training programs, adult literacy efforts and the development of affordable housing stock. We know these are effective tools to improve family stability, economic security, and positive outcomes for all of our children.”

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve and ensure the health, economic well-being, education, and safety of Rhode Island children. The organization is one of fifty state-level organizations that work in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the social condition of children at the state and local level across the country.