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North Carolina Ranks 33rd in Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being *Declines in Family Economic Security Temper Educational Gains*

RALEIGH, N.C., June 13, 2017— Low scores in economic indicators, such as child poverty, place North Carolina in the bottom half of the United States for overall child well-being, according to the *2017 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being, and family and community — that represent what children need most to thrive. North Carolina ranked 22nd in the education domain, but placed in the bottom half of states across health, family and community, and economic well-being domains.

“The economic circumstances in which children grow and learn have a lifelong impact on their health, education, and future economic success,” said Laila A. Bell, director of research and data at NC Child. “North Carolina policymakers can and should do more to improve economic well-being for children and families. Increasing public investments in early childhood education, health care, and public schools will create opportunity for children, families and communities across the state.”

According to the *Data Book*, North Carolina ranks:

- **22nd in education.** The education domain examines the percentage of children ages 3 and 4 not attending school; fourth graders not proficient in reading; eighth graders not proficient in math; and high school students not graduating on time. The percentage of North Carolina’s fourth graders fell 9 percent from 2010 to 2015, however eighth graders not proficient in math rose 5 percent during that same time period.
- **31st in health.** The health domain examines data related to number low-birthweight babies; number of children without health insurance; child and teen deaths; teens who abused alcohol or drugs in the past year. A highlight of the *Data Book* is North Carolina’s improvement in expanding health insurance coverage among children, with only 4 percent remaining uninsured. However, North Carolina ranks 41st in low-birthweight babies, contributing to the state’s ongoing challenges preventing infant mortality, particularly for children of color.
- **36th in family and community domain.** This domain examines the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas; single-parent households, education levels among heads of households, as well as teen birth rates. The teen birth rate in North Carolina declined 37 percent since 2010.
- **37th in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether teens are not in school or working. Although the percentage of North Carolina children living in poverty dropped 8 percent since 2010, the state is in the bottom half of the country in all economic well-being indicators, with its worst rank in child poverty at 37th, tied with Florida.

North Carolina's high rank in health insurance coverage is largely due to expansions in coverage created by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medicaid, and NC Health Choice. Unfortunately, health insurance rates have the potential to worsen if Congress votes to approve the pending American Health Care Act (AHCA) or similar legislation, or if Congress fails to fund the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The AHCA would roll back key provisions of the ACA and would cut and cap the Medicaid program, which would have a profound impact on children's coverage and the benefits that are available to them. CHIP provides health insurance to over 100,000 children in North Carolina. It is unclear how these children would retain insurance coverage with the loss of federal funding.

"The gains we have made in children's health insurance coverage are largely a result of investing in and strengthening public health insurance programs, like Medicaid and CHIP," said Bell. "To preserve and build on our past progress, the U.S. Senate must reject the cuts to Medicaid and consumer protections in the American Health Care Act, and Congress must approve additional funding for CHIP."

In addition to maintaining key programs and protections for children's health insurance, NC Child identifies three policies that could improve the well-being of children in North Carolina:

- **Health:** Increase health insurance access for low-income adults of reproductive age. North Carolina can still use federal funds to expand affordable health insurance to adults and parents, which will have a positive effect on the physical, mental, and financial health of the entire family.
- **Education:** Invest in early childhood education programs. Brain science has taught us that the first few years of development can position a child for success in school and life. Supporting early childhood education opportunities at the local, state and federal level enables children to reach critical milestones that can lead to a lifetime of success.
- **Economic Security:** Invest in programs that reduce or mitigate the negative effects of poverty on child health and development. This includes preserving categorical eligibility for SNAP, which provides critical nutrition assistance to low-income households. Research shows SNAP support improved academic, behavioral and health outcomes for low-income children.

Release Information

The 2017 KIDS COUNT® *Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

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About NC Child

NC Child builds a strong North Carolina by advancing public policies to ensure all children – regardless of race, ethnicity, or place of birth – have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing

solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.