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Until 12:01 a.m. EDT
July 27, 2010

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A Project of

The Annie E. Casey

Foundation

Rates of Children Living in Poverty Already on the Rise Before Recession Started One Million More Children Living in Poverty in 2008

Baltimore, Md., July 27, 2010 – According to data released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, overall improvements in child well-being that began in the late 1990s stalled in the years just before the current economic downturn.

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- Five areas have improved: the infant mortality rate, child death rate, teen death rate, and teen birth rate; and the percent of teens not in school and not high school graduates.
- Three areas have worsened: the percent of babies born low-birthweight, the child poverty rate, and the percent of children living in single-parent families.
- Two areas are not comparable: changes made to the American Community Survey's (ACS) 2008 questionnaire regarding employment affected the ability to track trends for the percent of teens not in school and not working, and the percent of children in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment.

“We won’t be able to assess the full impact of the economic downturn on children and families for a number of years,” said Laura Beavers, national KIDS COUNT coordinator at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “The economic data that the Census Bureau will release later this year will give a better picture of family economic well-being in the recession. However, even data from 2008 that was collected before the recession took hold shows economic conditions were worsening for kids.”

Based on trend data released by the Casey Foundation, the rate of children living in poverty in 2008 was 18 percent, indicating that 1 million more children were living in poverty in that year than in 2000. Experts project that more up-to-date Census data will show the child poverty climbing to above 20 percent.

This year’s *Data Book* offers good news as well. More teens in 2008 across all five of the largest racial and ethnic groups were either in school or had obtained a high school diploma or General Education Diploma compared with teens in 2000.

According to the report, the teen birth rate fell from 48 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2000 to 43 births per 1,000 females in this age range in 2007. However, there is bad news related to teen births. Although still below the rate of 2000, the teen birth rate did increase from 40 to 43 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19 between 2005 and 2007.

Looking across all child well-being indicators, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Vermont rank highest, and Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi rank the lowest. Six states with the biggest improvements in their rankings between 2000-2007 (health data) and 2000-2008 (economic data) are New York, Maryland, North Carolina, Illinois, Oregon, and Wyoming. The five states with the biggest drops in their rankings between 2000-2007 and 2000-2008 are Montana, South Dakota, Maine, Alaska, and Hawaii.

(more)

In addition to the 10 key measures tracked in the *Data Book*, the KIDS COUNT Data Center (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org>) provides easy, online access to the latest child well-being data on hundreds of indicators by state, county, city, and school district. It serves as a comprehensive source of information for policymakers, advocates, members of the media, and others concerned with addressing the needs of children, families, and communities.

“Our *KIDS COUNT* project has made significant strides in tracking results and compiling data on children and families during the past two decades,” said Patrick T. McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “But the reality is that we can only go so far without needed improvements to our data collection systems. None of us has a good grasp on the conditions facing America’s children because state and federal agencies collect data too infrequently, and often do not measure what really matters for kids.”

The Casey Foundation recommends four simple and relatively inexpensive steps that the federal government can take to improve the collection of data on our nation’s children. These include the following:

- **Expand the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH):** This survey was last conducted in 2007 and is not scheduled again until 2011. As a result, it has not been possible to fully gauge the effects of the severe economic downturn on children. Casey supports the expansion and enhancement of the NSCH, allowing greater frequency of data collection and a broader range of child well-being indicators.
- **Adopt a Supplemental Poverty Measure:** The lack of a modern poverty measure has created a serious gap in the knowledge about how children are faring. The current poverty measure is based on spending patterns typical of the 1950s and doesn’t capture non-cash benefits such as food stamps and child care. The Census Bureau has announced that a supplemental poverty measure will be released in the fall of 2011 that will include an assessment of both family income and expenses, providing more accurate data to guide policy decisions.
- **Increase the Sample Size of the American Community Survey (ACS):** The ACS could be an even more valuable tool to gauge child well-being measures if the sample size were increased to provide more precise data for urban neighborhoods and sparsely populated rural communities. The Casey Foundation supports an increase in the sample size of this survey that is the primary source of community-level data in the country.
- **Address Problems in the Vital Records System:** Over the past few years, significant gaps and delays in compiling key data on health have occurred. This has resulted from years of underinvestment at the National Center for Health Statistics and difficulty implementing recent changes to birth and death certificates. To rectify these lags, Congress should make a one-time appropriation of \$30 million to help states transition to the new forms, modernize the Vital Statistics system, and then provide additional funds to support this key data stream.
The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data launches at 12:01 a.m. EDT, July 27, 2010 at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. By visiting the Data Center, users can download the complete *Data Book*, access hundreds of other measures of child well-being, and view real-time information on portable devices.