

For Immediate Release:

July 22, 2014

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Twenty-fifth Edition of *KIDS COUNT Data Book* ranks Alabama 44th in overall child well-being for the second year in a row

Report highlights trends in economic well-being, education, health, and family and community indicators since 1990

MONTGOMERY — Demographic, social, and economic changes combined with major policy developments have affected the lives of the nation's and Alabama's children in both positive and negative ways since 1990, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 25th edition of its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

The *Data Book* ranks Alabama 44th in the nation in overall child well-being, which is the same ranking the state held last year --- and one of the best ever since the first publication of the *Data Book* a quarter of a century ago.

The good news is that there has been steady improvement across the country in the number of children attending preschool and a decline in the number of K-12 children not proficient in reading and math. There is also a positive trend in parental education that benefits kids: a smaller percentage of children live in families in which no parent has a high school diploma – 22 percent to 15 percent.

In addition, the national teen birth rate is at a historic low and the death rate for children and teens has fallen as a result of medical advances and increased usage of seat belts, car seats, and bike helmets. In Alabama specifically, it appears the 1997 creation of child death review teams had a positive impact on further reducing preventable deaths.

"The 2014 national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* reaffirms that the programs our state lawmakers have put in place over the last two decades are making a difference in the lives of children, but the current rankings show that we still have a long road to travel to get to where we want and need Alabama to be," said Melanie Bridgeforth, executive director of VOICES for Alabama's Children. "While the recent gains are encouraging for our state, this is no time to be complacent. State lawmakers are making decisions today that will shape the next twenty-five years for Alabama's children and it is vital that our state leaders continue to prioritize what is good for our kids."

Worrisome trends include a rise in the official child poverty rate as defined by the federal government – a drop from 18 to 16 percent from 1990 to 2000. By 2012, the rate reached 23 percent nationally and 27 percent in Alabama.

The percentage of the nation’s children living in single-parent families has risen significantly – in 1990 this stood at 25 percent and by 2012 the figure had risen to 35 percent. By 2012, Alabama’s rate was even higher at 39 percent. The rate of children growing up in poor communities has increased, with 13 percent of children (15 percent in Alabama) living in a neighborhood where the poverty rate is 30 percent or more.

“With advances in neuroscience, as well as solid research on what works, we now know more than ever before about how to give children a good start and help them meet major developmental milestones throughout childhood,” said Patrick McCarthy, the Foundation’s president and CEO. “On several fronts, we’ve seen the difference that smart policies, effective programs and high quality practice can make in improving child well-being and long term outcomes. We should all be encouraged by the improvements in many well-being indicators in the health, education and safety areas.”

To examine the more recent trends between 2005 and 2012, the new *Data Book* uses 16 indicators across four areas – Economic Well-Being, Education, Health and Family and Community. The following were the findings:

- **Children continue to make progress in the areas of education and health.** All four education indicators covering milestones such as pre-K attendance and high school graduation showed steady improvements in the U.S. This held true for Alabama as well with the exception of pre-K attendance, which remained unchanged at 59 percent not attending pre-K. With the state’s recent commitment to expand First Class Pre-K Program funding, however, nearly 1,800 more four-year-olds will have access to the top-ranked program. Child health also improved across all four indicators, and more children have access to health insurance coverage than before the recession. Alabama ranks 5th in the nation in the lowest percentage of children (4 percent) without health insurance, which can largely be contributed to the implementation of ALL Kids. Also on a positive note, the state ranks 2nd in the nation in the lowest percentage of teens ages 12 to 17 who abused alcohol or drugs from 2011 to 2012.
- **Economic progress still lags, even after the end of the recession.** Three of the four economic well-being indicators were worse than the mid-decade years, which is not surprising given the severity of the economic crisis over the past six years. However, the majority of the indicators in this area improved slightly at the national level since the 2013 *Data Book*, indicating modest but hopeful signs of recovery. In Alabama, half of the indicators showed a slight improvement since last year’s *Data Book* and the other half remained unchanged.
- **Mixed picture on Family and Community indicators.** The teen birth rate is at a historic low. There was a small drop in the percent of children living in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma. In Alabama, this percentage has gone from 17 percent in 2005 to 14 percent in 2012. However, in the United States and in Alabama, there was an increase in the percent of children living in single-parent families and children living in high-poverty areas.

At the state level, 49 states, including Alabama, have seen improvements since 2005 in 8th grade math proficiency. Alabama, however, ranks last in the nation in this indicator with 80 percent of 8th graders not proficient in math.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation funds a KIDS COUNT project in each state, in addition to the national *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. VOICES for Alabama's Children is the Casey Foundation's Alabama grantee. VOICES for Alabama's Children publishes the annual *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*, which documents child well-being in each of the state's 67 counties. The *2014 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* will be available in the fall.

"The Foundation's partnership with state and national advocates for children has thrived since our first *Data Book* and has brought steady attention to how kids are faring," said Laura Speer, Casey's associate director for policy reform and advocacy. "The *Data Book* highlights the achievements of advocates across the country that have been critical in advancing increased investment in effective programs and services to help ensure that kids get the best possible start in life."

"At the end of the summer, VOICES for Alabama's Children will release our state-based Kids Count report," said Bridgeforth. "Our report will build on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's work and dig deeper into the well-being of Alabama's children in all 67 counties. The two reports combined will provide a detailed road map for lawmakers to follow to continue to move the well-being of our kids forward."

The [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available in the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being. Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and view real-time information on mobile devices.

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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.

VOICES for Alabama's Children is a statewide nonprofit that works to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness, and advocacy. For more information, visit VOICES for Alabama's Children's website at www.alavoices.org.