



## PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Sharon Kayne, Communications Director, NM Voices for Children  
505-244-9505 ext. 110 (p), 505-401-8709 (c), 505-244-9509 (f), skayne@nmvoices.org

### **KIDS COUNT Report: NM Still Ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in Nation for Child Well-Being** Some areas see improvement, others see decline

ALBUQUERQUE—New Mexico has seen small improvements in some areas of child well-being over the last few years, but those gains are counteracted by declines in other areas. For 2015, the state's national KIDS COUNT® ranking stays at 49<sup>th</sup>—unmoved since last year—in the new edition of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, set for release on July 21.

The national *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranks the 50 states on 16 indicators of child well-being that fall into the categories of Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community. As with last year, New Mexico is ranked 49<sup>th</sup>. The state had dropped to 50<sup>th</sup> in 2013.

“Child poverty continues to increase in New Mexico, and that does not bode well for the future of our state,” said Veronica C. García, Ed.D., executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, which runs the KIDS COUNT program in New Mexico. “If we want to tackle child poverty then we must see more effort in improving educational and health outcomes. Healthy and educated children will have a fighting chance of moving out of poverty,” she said.

New Mexico's child poverty rate was 29 percent in last year's *Data Book* (using 2012 data). That has risen to 31 percent in the new report that uses 2013 data). Similarly, the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas increased—from 22 percent (2008-12 data) to 24 percent (2009-13 data). The long-term data are even worse. The number of children living in high-poverty areas has increased by 25,000 kids, and 27,000 more children live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment than did in 2008.

“Over the last several years we've seen 38,000 children fall into poverty in New Mexico. That is simply not acceptable,” said Dr. García. “Poverty has very detrimental effects on children. If we want them to succeed in life—to be the next generation of doctors, entrepreneurs, teachers and leaders—we need to ensure that they have the opportunities that will put them on the right path early in life.”

The bright spots in the data as compared to last year's release include the percentage of high school students not graduating on time (decreasing from 29 percent to 26 percent), the child and teen death rate (decreasing from 33 per 100,000 to 28 per 100,000) and the teen birth rate (decreasing from 47 per 1,000 to 43 per 1,000). The improvements in child and teen death rates and teen birth rates mirror a nationwide trend where these indicators have continued to improve over a number of years.

"The solutions to our child poverty problem are not rocket science," said Dr. Garcia. "We know what works—ensuring that children have the high-quality care and learning experiences in the early years to support robust brain development, ensuring they can see a doctor and have enough nutritious food, and providing our schools and educators with the resources they need to do their jobs properly. These are ways to meet some of their basic needs. But we also must ensure that their parents have the opportunities they need to improve their own lot—from support for continuing education, job training, and child care to ensuring decent wages and earned sick leave."

The Casey Foundation makes similar policy recommendations found in the 2014 report, [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach](#).

An embargoed copy of the 2015 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is available online on July 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

An embargoed New Mexico data sheet is attached separately.

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KIDS COUNT is a program of New Mexico Voices for Children and is made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities. 625 Silver Ave. SW, Suite 195, Albuquerque, NM 87102; 505-244-9505 (p); [www.nmvoices.org](http://www.nmvoices.org)