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**Georgia Falls Two Spots to 42nd in Annual Child Well-Being Ranking;
State Shows Steady Improvement Across Multiple Domains**

ATLANTA – This year, Georgia fell two spots to 42nd in the nation in child and family well-being, according to the annual *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Despite this drop on the yearly index, Georgia’s data improved or held steady in every domain compared to last year’s report; most areas since 2008–2010 have improved.

The report tracks 16 indicators in four areas – economic well-being, education, health, and family and community – and assigns each state an overall ranking and a rank for each individual area.

“Though Georgia’s economic indicators are still not back to pre-recession levels, they did improve over last year’s data,” says Rebecca Rice, Georgia KIDS COUNT Coordinator. “This marks the second year in a row that Georgia has seen a drop in child poverty after experiencing steady increases during the recession. This year, the rate fell to 26.3 percent, down from 26.7 percent in last year’s book and from the high of 27.3 percent in 2012. But the percent of kids in poverty in Georgia remains higher than the national average of 22 percent.”

Children growing up in families with a high housing cost burden – defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on housing, which can make it difficult for families to make ends meet – dropped from 36 percent last year to 35 percent this year, which is on par with the national average and represents a significant drop from its peak of 41 percent in 2010.

The percentage of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment dropped to 31 percent this year – well below its recession-era high of 35 percent in 2011 – putting Georgia at 30th in the nation for this indicator. Teens not in school and not working remained steady at 10 percent, which

represents an improvement over five years ago, but is still higher than the national average of 7 percent. Even with the gains made over the last few years, Georgia ranks 45th in the nation in economic well-being.

Georgia continues to make steady improvement across several education indicators, including reading scores and high school graduation. Georgia still ranks 48th in the nation for on-time graduation as of 2012/2013, with 30 percent of students not graduating on time; this figure represents a 14 percent improvement since 2007/2008.

Reading proficiency has improved significantly over the past five years, yet 66 percent of Georgia fourth graders still could not read proficiently, tying the state for 33rd in the nation. Georgia is tied for 38th in eighth grade math proficiency, with 72 percent of kids scoring below proficient. School enrollment for 3- and 4-year olds remains steady: the state is tied for 11th in the nation with 50 percent of young children enrolled in school. Overall, Georgia sits at 39th place for education.

“Georgia is moving forward and making improvements to help kids master the skills they need to succeed in school and in the workforce,” says Georgia Family Connection Executive Director Gaye Smith. “Georgia is investing in educational initiatives that will close achievement gaps and help to narrow racial and income disparities. These statewide investments include encouraging young Georgians to read on grade-level, increasing access to Quality Rated child care and implementing a new Milestones testing system designed to offer a consistent program across grades three through twelve.”

In the health domain, the percentage of low-birthweight babies held steady this year at 9.5 percent and the percentage of Georgia children using drugs and alcohol is on par with the national average of 5 percent. Georgia’s child and teen death rate fell to 26 per 100,000 kids ages 1 to 19. And at 92 percent, more Georgia children have health insurance than in previous years, boosting Georgia’s rank for overall child health to 36th in the nation.

In family and community well-being, Georgia saw its teen birth rate continue to fall to historic lows, while the percentage of children in single-parent families decreased slightly. The percentage of children growing up in high-poverty areas remained steady compared to last year’s data. Georgia’s teen birth rate is now 28 per 1,000 girls ages 15-19, down from 30 per 1,000 last year and 50 per 1,000 in 2008, putting Georgia at 33rd in the nation for teen births. Children growing up in homes where the head of the household did not have a diploma remained steady from last year at 14 percent – the same as the national average – and showed slight improvement over five years ago, when it was at 15 percent.

“Despite a drop in annual rank, Georgia continues its trend of steady improvements across all areas,” concludes Rice. “We believe continuing our

investments in early childhood education and in school-age children, will help propel Georgia toward greater improvements. This new trend data show that Georgia is moving in that direction.”

The 2016 *Data Book* will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org.

Additional information is available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

For interactive statewide data, visit Georgia KIDS COUNT at gafcp.org/kidscount.

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and funders from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia’s children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from **The Annie E. Casey Foundation**, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.

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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.