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**The Annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* Finds that Hawaii Teens are Making Progress  
But Economic Conditions May Impede Better Outcomes for Children**

*Percentage of HI Kids In Poverty Continues to Increase*

MANOA— According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2016 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book*, Hawaii ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> in the nation on overall child well-being, a slight improvement from 24<sup>th</sup> last year.

The 2016 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* continues to look at child well-being in the midst of the country’s economic recovery, after the recession ended in June 2009. The data book focuses on trends over the last six years (roughly 2008 – 2014). It also examines the influence of parents’ education, health and other life circumstances on child well-being.

“The most troubling news from this year’s report is that Hawaii continues to see increases in the share of children growing up in poverty and harsh economic conditions,” says Ivette Rodriguez Stern, the Hawai‘i KIDS COUNT project director at the University of Hawai‘i Center on the Family. “One bright note is that despite economic challenges, Hawaii teens are making progress.”

The teen birth rate decreased during the period examined, down 41 percent since 2008. The proportion of high school students graduating on time has increased slightly, up to 78 percent in 2012/2013 (the most current year for which data are available) from 76 percent in 2007/2008.

However, despite the economic recovery and rising employment, an increasing number of Hawaii’s children are growing up in economic hardship. “While we are below the national average, the percent of children in our state living in poverty increased by 50 percent between 2008 and 2014, compared to the 22 percent increase seen across the nation during that time,” explains Stern. “Our child poverty rate now stands at 15 percent, which is also slightly higher than the 13 percent reported last year.”

In addition, increases in the number of children whose parents lack secure employment and the number of children who live in high-poverty neighborhoods have persisted. And while the share of children living in households with a high housing cost burden (i.e., where more than 30

percent of the household income is spent on housing) has improved slightly (decreasing from 47 percent in 2008 to 41 percent in 2014), Hawaii has among the worst housing cost burden rates in the nation, ranking 45<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states on this indicator.

“These data understate the proportion of children growing up in economic hardship,” says Stern. “Research shows that families need income at least twice the poverty level, probably more in Hawaii given our high cost of living, just to cover basic living expenses like food, housing, transportation and childcare. According to Census data, about one-third of our children are now growing up in those low-income families that are facing the challenges of just getting by, up from a little over a quarter in 2008.”

Decades of research show how growing up in financial hardship can have profound effects on children, especially when the hardship occurs early in life, impacting their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. If these issues go unaddressed or a child continues to experience economic hardship, chances increase for difficulties later in life, such as dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and poor employment outcomes.

The encouraging news is that the *Data Book* outlines policy recommendations that are consistent with efforts gaining momentum in Hawaii to increase opportunity and reduce poverty and inequality.

“To ensure good outcomes for this generation of young children, we must continue to expand access to high quality preschool and early childhood services for keiki age birth through four,” says Dr. Barbara DeBaryshe, Specialist at the Center on the Family and an expert in early childhood education. “We currently have 19 state Pre-K classrooms located in DOE schools throughout the islands. The State Legislature also recently increased funding for the Preschool Open Doors Program so that more low-income children can attend early learning programs. However, with nearly half of our three- and four-year-olds still not participating in early learning programs, we must continue to do more so that all of Hawaii’s children have a fair chance to develop their potential as they grow.”

The report also provides a recommendation to ensure family economic security in the face of a health crisis or when a major family event occurs, like the birth of a child. Paid family leave is recommended as a way to help low-income families and low-wage earners balance their obligations at home and in the workplace. Legislation was proposed this past session for a paid family leave program in Hawaii. While the measure did not pass, progress was made with the passage of a Senate resolution that establishes a task force to examine the benefits and costs of such a program in Hawaii. “While all employees in Hawaii will be positively impacted by a paid family leave program, such a policy is especially critical for low-income families that have few resources and support when a family member is ill or a baby is born,” says Stern.

The *Data Book* ranks each state on overall child well-being. Hawaii sits in the middle range for national child well-being, ranking 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 50 states. Findings in the four domains measured include the following:

- Two of the four economic conditions – children in poverty and children whose parents lack secure employment – worsened over the six year period, with the increases being

statistically significant. The percent of teens (16- to 19-years-old) not in school or working has remained somewhat stable, increasing only slightly. The percent of children in households with a high housing cost burden has decreased, but Hawaii remains well above the national average (with 41 percent of children living in such households in Hawaii, compared to 35 percent across the country). Hawaii ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 50 states in the economic well-being domain.

- Gains in the education domain have been made over the period examined. Reading and math proficiency scores improved and, though the increase has been slight, so has percentage of high school students graduating on time. However, there has been a small but statistically significant increase in the proportion of preschool-aged children not in school and Hawaii continues to rank near the bottom in the education domain (33<sup>rd</sup> out of 50 states).
- The health conditions measured – percent of low-birthweight babies, children without health insurance, the child and teen death rate and the percent of teens who abuse substances – have remained relatively stable or improved slightly. Hawaii ranks 8<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in the health domain.
- Hawaii is also doing well in the area of family and community well-being, ranking 12<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states. Two indicators – children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma and the teen birth rate – have improved. The proportion of children in single-parent families has remained somewhat stable, increasing only slightly. The share of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods (i.e., where 30 percent or more of the residents are poor) has also increased.

The *2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available on June 21, 2016, at 12:01 am EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://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 at <http://mobile.kidscount.org>.

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation funds a nationwide network of state-level KIDS COUNT projects, which includes the Center on the Family in Hawai‘i. The Center is a unit within the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The Center’s mission is to enhance the well-being of Hawai‘i’s families through interdisciplinary research, education, and community outreach. For more information about the Center, visit [www.uhfamily.hawaii.edu](http://www.uhfamily.hawaii.edu).*

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