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Hawai'i Ranks 17th in Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being

2017 KIDS COUNT® Data Book shows signs of improvement in the economic well-being of Hawai'i's children, but policy investments are still needed in education

HONOLULU, June 13, 2017 — Economic conditions may finally be improving and families continue to offer a strong foundation for Hawai'i's children, according to the *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The *Data Book*, which examines trends in child well-being during the post-recession years, found that Hawai'i now ranks 23rd in child economic well-being, and 17th for child well-being overall.

"We're seeing a steady decrease in the number of children living in families where the parents lack secure employment," says **Ivette Rodriguez Stern**, the Hawai'i KIDS COUNT project director at the University of Hawai'i Center on the Family. "As parental employment improves, we begin to see improvements in other indicators of economic well-being."

The rate of children living in households with a high housing cost burden — defined as a household spending more than 30 percent or more of income on housing — is one indicator that has steadily improved, decreasing from 46 percent in 2010 to 38 percent in 2015. However, Hawai'i still has among the worst housing cost burden rates in the nation, ranking 46th for this indicator.

"High housing costs remain a significant challenge in our state. When families spend so much of their income on housing, they have fewer resources to meet other basic needs. We all — including government and the private sector — need to come together to build more affordable housing in Hawai'i," said **Nicole Woo**, senior policy analyst at The Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice.

Despite some improvements on individual indicators, Hawai'i is lagging in the education domain, ranking 36th. Although there have been some improvements in reading and math proficiency, Hawai'i's children are still below national proficiency rates and more than half of 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in preschool programs.

"Access to high-quality, affordable child care and preschool must remain a priority in our state," said **Dr. Barbara DeBaryshe**, interim director of the University of Hawai'i Center on the Family. "Strong programs support school readiness and give an extra boost to children facing the

difficult odds of poverty or family hardship. Sadly, we simply do not have enough child care seats in our state, especially for infants and toddlers. We need policy incentives that allow providers to serve more children, give families more assistance paying for care and help more programs reach quality benchmarks. Investments in our keiki now will have large payoffs in the future.”

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains that represent what children need most to thrive. Findings for Hawai‘i include the following:

- Three of four economic indicators — the percentage of children whose parents lack secure employment, children in households with a high housing cost burden, and teens not in school and not working — have improved since the release of the *2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The percentage of children living in poverty has failed to improve past 2010 levels and returned to 14 percent in 2015.
- There were improvements in three of the four indicators in the education domain compared to 2010 data — reading and math proficiency and the percentage of high schoolers graduating on time — however, the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds not in preschool increased by 18 percent from 2010 to 2015.
- With only 2 percent of our children lacking health insurance coverage, Hawai‘i continues to lead the nation in health, ranking eighth in this domain. This represents a 50 percent decrease in the percentage of kids without insurance compared to 2010.
- Hawai‘i is also doing well in the family and community context, ranking 10th in this domain. The teen birth rate has continued an impressive decline of 36 percent since 2010, and we have fewer children living in high poverty neighborhoods in 2015 than in 2010.

Besides emphasizing investments in early childhood education programs, with the *Data Book*, the Annie E. Casey Foundation demonstrates the need for protecting health insurance coverage for children and expanding programs that create economic stability for families at the state and federal levels.

“We’ve done well in making sure that our children have health insurance coverage. However, health care reforms that limit federal funds coming to our state for Medicaid or that allow insurers to deny coverage for pre-existing conditions will threaten the well-being of our most vulnerable children and youth. We must continue to work hard at all levels to make sure that coverage is not jeopardized,” said Stern.

Woo adds, “On a positive note, this year the Legislature approved a state earned income tax credit (EITC). Unfortunately, the state credit is non-refundable, which will limit tax refunds available to families when the amount of their EITC is larger than what they owe in state income tax. Nevertheless, this is a great start and represents breakthrough legislation that supports low-income families and children in our state.”

Release Information

The *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About the University of Hawai'i Center on the Family

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa serves approximately 20,000 students pursuing more than 225 different degrees. Coming from every Hawaiian island, every state in the nation, and more than 100 countries, UH Mānoa students thrive in an enriching environment for the global exchange of ideas. For more information, visit <http://manoa.hawaii.edu> and <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/media/>. The Center on the Family is a unit within the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The Center serves as the KIDS COUNT grantee in Hawai'i. Its 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.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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.

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