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Kentucky's 40th in KIDS COUNT Ranking of Child Well-Being

Jeffersontown, KY – Kentucky ranks 40th in the nation in over-all child well-being according to the national *2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The annual publication uses the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children in each state.

The *Data Book* reveals that Kentucky improved on four of the 10 measures affecting child well-being since 2000: infant mortality rate, child death rate, teen death rate, and percent of teens not in school and not high school graduates. On three other measures, conditions have worsened since 2000: percent of low-birthweight babies, percent of children in poverty, and percent of children in single parent families. Conditions remained unchanged on one measure: the rate of births to teens ages 15-19, and two others were not comparable to previous years: percent of teens not attending school and not working, and percent of children whose parents lack secure employment.

Kentucky's improvement on mortality indicators is in line with national trends. Since 2000, the state's infant mortality rate fell 7 percent to 6.7 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2007. Similarly, the child death rate has dropped 4 percent to 22 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14 in 2007. Kentucky's 2007 teen death rate was 10 percent lower than it was in 2000, at 74 deaths per 100,000 teens ages 15-19.

"Kentucky legislators took key steps in recent years to bring down child and teen mortality rates," said Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "We can already see evidence of fewer teen deaths thanks to the Graduated Driver's License Law which went into effect in October of 2006. We expect to see fewer child deaths as a result of the Booster Seat Law that went into effect in July of 2008."

Another area of improvement was the percent of teens ages 16 to 19 who are not in school and are not high school graduates. While Kentucky's rank relative to other states improved significantly, from 36th in 2007, to 25th in 2008, the rate decreased slightly from 8

percent in 2007 to 7 percent in 2008. Despite improvement, there were still almost 16,000 teens in 2008 who were not pursuing a high school diploma and had not completed high school.

In 2008, 10 percent, or almost 24,000 Kentucky teens ages 16 to 19 were not in school and not working. With a ranking of 38th in the nation, Kentucky is faring poorly compared to other states, but due to changes in the survey used, changes over time are not measurable.

An indicator which has continued to grow worse in Kentucky is the percent of low-birthweight babies. Since 2000, the percent of low-birthweight babies in Kentucky has gradually risen from 8.2 percent to 9.3 percent in 2007. While this increase mirrors national trends, Kentucky continues to experience a higher percentage than the nation as a whole and ranked 43rd in the nation in 2007.

“We know that the number of mothers who report smoking during pregnancy in Kentucky continues to remain high, and there is a clear link between smoking during pregnancy and low birthweights,” said Amy Swann, policy analyst for Kentucky Youth Advocates. “For the first time, our recently passed state budget provides allocations for smoking cessation programs for Kentuckians who receive Medicaid which is an important step to improving health outcomes for mothers and babies.”

Kentucky children continue to rank poorly on economic indicators. Since 2000, the rate of children living in poverty increased by 5 percent, with 23 percent living in poverty in 2008. In 2008, one-third of Kentucky’s children—33 percent—lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment. While this number cannot be compared to previous years’ data, Kentucky currently ranks 48th in the nation on this indicator.

“Research consistently shows that ongoing exposure to economic hardship, especially when children are young, can compromise their development – limiting their opportunities, academic achievement, and future health and productivity,” said Brooks. “Work supports such as child care assistance, the earned income tax credit, public health insurance, and benefits for the unemployed are critical tools for Kentucky families because they both promote employment and help parents stay in the labor force and get ahead.”

View the National 2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book online at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook/Default.aspx>

This coming September, Kentucky Youth Advocates will release the 2010 Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book. The 20th addition of the County Data Book will provide updated data at the state and county level on indicators of economic well-being including: child poverty, median household income, children receiving food stamps, infants and children receiving WIC, public schools students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals, child support,

children receiving KTAP, children receiving Supplemental Security Income, Earned Income Tax Credit returns, Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit returns, unemployment, and affordable housing.

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Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization.

KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.