



CONTACT: Teresa Falgoust
(504) 586-8509, ext. 117
tfalgoust@agendaforchildren.org

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
July 27, 2010, 12:01 p.m. EDT

Louisiana Ranked 49th in KIDS COUNT Report on Child Well-Being

NEW ORLEANS— A new report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation today ranks Louisiana 49th among states in overall child well-being. The Casey Foundation's 21st annual KIDS COUNT Data Book ranks states on ten basic measures of child well-being, assessing children's health, economic status, family structure and education. Louisiana ranked among the bottom ten states on every measure included in the report.

"It is truly disheartening to see Louisiana ranked 49th in the KIDS COUNT Data Book for the ninth straight year," said Judy Watts, President/CEO of Agenda for Children. "For far too long, Louisiana's high poverty rate has been the root cause of Louisiana's poor rankings on many of these indicators. With many Louisiana families suffering from the effects of the recession and the recent oil spill, it is more important than ever that families have the opportunities they need to become self-sufficient."

Despite Louisiana's overall low ranking, the KIDS COUNT data shows that Louisiana has seen improvements in some areas since 2000, including the teen birthrate, the high school dropout rate, the child poverty rate and the child death rate. Overall, conditions worsened on four indicators since 2000, including the rate of low birthweight babies, the infant mortality rate, the teen death rate and the percentage of children in single-parent families. Data for two additional indicators—secure parental employment and teens who are neither in school nor working—were not comparable between 2000 and 2008 due to changes in employment-related questions in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

The 2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book shows:

- **Child death rate declines:** Louisiana's child death rate declined by 9% between 2000 and 2007, falling from 32 to 29 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14.
- **High school dropout rate improves:** The percentage of Louisiana teens ages 16-19 who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or a GED declined by 9% between 2000 and 2008. Nevertheless, with 10% of Louisiana teens ages 16-19 falling into this category, Louisiana's high school dropout rate remains well above the national average of 6%.
- **Low birthweight babies and infant mortality show recent decreases:** While Louisiana's rates of low birthweight babies and infant mortality remain higher than

(more)

2000 levels, both measures have seen more improvements. After rising steadily between 2000 and 2005, the percentage of Louisiana babies born at a low birthweight decreased from 11.5% in 2005 to 11.0% in 2007. Likewise, between 2004 and 2007, Louisiana's infant mortality rate dropped from 10.5 to 9.2 deaths per 1,000 live births.

- **Child poverty is down:** Louisiana's child poverty rate dipped from 27% in 2000 to 25% in 2008, although it is important to note that poverty data from 2008 reflects families' economic conditions for 12 months prior to the survey date. As a result, the improvement in child poverty does not reflect the impact of the economic recession because most families did not begin to feel the full force of the recession until late 2008 and into 2009. While Louisiana's child poverty rate improved between 2000 and 2008, the national child poverty rate increased from 17% to 18% during the same time period, reflecting an increase of more than 1 million children living in poverty.
- **Teen birthrate is on the rise:** While Louisiana's teen birthrate remains below 2000 levels, the teen birthrate increased between 2005 and 2006 and again between 2006 and 2007, reversing a trend of regular declines since the early 1990s. In 2007, there were 57 births to teens per 1,000 teen females ages 15-19.

"Next year, Louisiana's governor and legislators are going to face some very difficult decisions as they deal with a major budget shortfall," says Judy Watts, President/CEO of Agenda for Children. "Just as families prioritize children's needs during tough times, decision-makers must put kids first in the state budget."

Watts pointed to the Louisiana Child Poverty Prevention Council as a promising strategy to improve the economic well-being of Louisiana's children. The Council released a set of recommendations that range from increasing the value of the state Earned Income Tax Credit to expanding evidence-based programs proven to improve child well-being, such as the Nurse Family Partnership Program.

"We are optimistic that, as health care reform connects more parents and potential mothers to health care, Louisiana will see our birth outcomes and infant mortality rate improve," says Teresa Falgoust, KIDS COUNT Coordinator at Agenda for Children. "Experts are increasingly recognizing that improving women's health before they even become pregnant is critical to improving birth outcomes. National health care reform promises to improve women's health (and consequently birth outcomes) through better access to health care."

Agenda for Children, Louisiana's statewide child advocacy organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. For more information, please visit the Agenda for Children website at www.agendaforchildren.org.

The KID COUNT Data Book with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data launches at 11:01 p.m. CDT, July 26, 2010 at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. Through the KIDS COUNT Data Center, users can download the complete Data Book, access hundreds of other measures of child well-being, and view real-time information on portable devices.

###