



**STATE OF TENNESSEE
TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Andrew Johnson Tower, Ninth Floor
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0800
(615) 741-2633 (FAX) 741-5956
1-800-264-0904

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Contact: Linda O'Neal
(615) 741-2633
linda.oneal@tn.gov
Pam Brown
pam.k.brown@tn.gov

Improving Outcomes for Children

Nashville — Tennessee achieved its best ranking ever in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The 41st ranking is the best in 21 years of KIDS COUNT scoring states on child well-being, based on 2007 or 2008 data, the most recent available nationally. This is substantially higher than the ranking of 46th the state received last year.

"Tennessee has worked diligently to improve outcomes for children in recent years," said Linda O'Neal, executive director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, the KIDS COUNT program state affiliate in Tennessee.

"Improvements in rankings demonstrate investments in essential services and supports produce results. Reported data are from before the current recession, highlighting the importance of maintaining effective programs for increasingly stressed families and communities in order to continue to make progress."

Tennessee's best ranking was 24th for child deaths. O'Neal said this reflects the positive impact of public policies for child safety like requiring vehicle child restraint devices and seat belts, life preservers in boats, and bicycle helmets.

In terms of infant mortality, fewer babies died and Tennessee's rate and ranking improved. The Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination, the Department of Health and TennCare have been involved in efforts to reduce infant mortality. Improving prenatal health, providing early and adequate prenatal care and implementing evidence based strategies like centering pregnancy to improve birth outcomes and home visiting for pregnant women and new parents all help mothers have healthier babies and reduce infant mortality.

The rate and ranking for teen deaths also improved. Good public policies contribute to better outcomes for adolescents. Compliance with Tennessee's graduated licensing requirements, consistent use of seatbelts, and avoiding distractions like texting and cell phone use all help young drivers focus on driving and safety. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of teen deaths.

Tennessee's second best ranking was 25th for the percent of children in high school or high school graduates at 7 percent, better than the national average of 8 percent. Tennessee laws requiring children to stay in school until their 18th birthday and linking eligibility for a driver's license to school attendance help keep more students in school.

"As our response to the recent flooding shows, Tennesseans have an unparalleled ability to come together as a community to address problems," said O'Neal. "Much of the foundation of services undergirding improvements in KIDS COUNT rankings have been put in place in recent years. Many are now virtually on life support as they are included in the current state budget with federal stimulus or reserve fund dollars that do not continue beyond June 2011.

"Tennessee will have difficulty continuing a trajectory of better outcomes for children without these essential programs."

The *Data Book* reveals that Tennessee improved on five of the 10 measures affecting child well-being since 2000. Yet on three other measures, conditions worsened for Tennessee's children. Two measures were not comparable to previous years.

The 21st annual Data Book is complemented by the expanded KIDS COUNT Data Center, which contains hundreds of measures of child well-being and allows users to create maps and graphs of the data at the national, state, county, and city level. To access information for Tennessee go to <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/tn>.

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is an independent agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly. Its primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families. Partial funding for TCCY's KIDS COUNT program is provided through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to disadvantaged children.

For more information, contact (615) 741-2633 or access TCCY's website at www.tn.gov/tccy.

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