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*West Virginia in the Bottom Ten on Four Indicators of Child Well Being
State Ranks 43rd in the Nation in Casey Foundation Report*

Charleston, WV, July 27, 2010 – Nationally, improvements in child well-being that began in the late 1990s stalled in the years that pre-dated the Great Recession. The 21st annual, national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* indicators show:

- Five areas of improvement: infant mortality rate, child death rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, and teens not in school and not high school graduates;
- Three areas have worsened: low-birthweight babies, children in poverty, and children in single-parent families;
- Two areas are not comparable, based on 2008 available data. This is due to changes in the American Community Survey's questionnaire regarding employment and affect the percent of teens not in school and not working, and the percent of children in families where no parent works full-time year-round.

“It is important to note that the data in this year’s *Data Book* do not reflect the current period of economic recession at the national level,” said Laura Beavers, coordinator of the national KIDS COUNT project. “The economic indicators in our 2010 report come from the 2008 American Community Survey, which reflects information for the 12 months prior to the survey date. The economic downturn effects were not felt by most U.S. families until the end of 2008 and into late 2009, with unemployment peaking in late 2009.”

The report ranked West Virginia 43rd in the nation overall in child well-being and in the bottom 10 states on four of the 10 indicators, including the percent of low-birth weight babies (46th), children living without secure parental employment (45th), children in poverty (43rd) and the child death rate (42nd). There was some good news for children in West Virginia: The state has 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 children in poverty). However, in two measures (percent low-birth weight babies and percent of children in single parent families), conditions for West Virginia children have worsened; in two others (teen birth rate and percent of teens not in school and not high school graduates), conditions have remained unchanged; and two of the indicators are not comparable to previous years.

Margie Hale, Executive Director of the West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund, noted, “We are especially concerned about our being in the bottom 10 states on four of the 10 indicators. We all agree that West Virginia’s children deserve a better start in life. So, we must begin to make the significant investments in young children that we know will make their lives better. That’s why KIDS COUNT is continuing to advocate for new state funding for a childcare quality rating and improvement system. Research clearly proves that improving the quality of childcare will pay big dividends in child well being and economic development.”

Between 2005 and 2007, West Virginia’s teen birth rate increased 9 percent to 47 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19, the same rate it was in 2000. This suggests possible reversal of the trend of declining teen births that had occurred in the first half of the 2000s. West Virginia’s child poverty rate was 23 percent in 2008, the same as it was a year earlier and lower than the 26 percent rate in 2000. However, in 2008, 32

percent of children in West Virginia lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment. This is well above the U.S. rate of 27 percent.

“There is good news that more teens in 2008 across all five of the largest racial and ethnic groups were either in school or had obtained a high school diploma or General Education Diploma compared with teens in 2000,” noted Beavers. “The bad news is that we see that the rate of children living in poverty moved from 17 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2008 – this is an increase of at least 1 million more children. Experts project the child poverty rate to climb to above 20 percent when the Census Bureau releases more up-to-date statistics later this year.”

The National KIDS COUNT Data Book also provides a first look at state-level teen birth rates for 2007 and shows that after more than a decade of steady decline, the teen birth rate is on the rise. Although still below the rate in 2000, the teen birth rate increased from 40 to 43 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19 between 2005 and 2007. State rates vary dramatically from a low of 20 births per 1,000 in New Hampshire to a high of 72 per 1,000 in Mississippi.

Looking across all well-being indicators, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Vermont rank highest, and Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi rank the lowest. Six states with the biggest improvements in their rankings between 2000-2007 (health data) and 2000-2008 (economic data) are New York, Maryland, North Carolina, Illinois, Oregon, and Wyoming. The five states with the biggest drops in their rankings between 2000-2007 and 2000-2008 are Montana, South Dakota, Maine, Alaska, and Hawaii.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and the new Data Center (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org>) respond to this need by providing a consistent, reliable source of information about children’s well-being. Data on 10 key measures and hundreds of additional indicators are now available at the state, county, city level, and school district-level, providing policymakers with the most comprehensive source of information.

The Casey Foundation recommends four simple and relatively inexpensive steps that the federal government can take to improve the collection of data on our nation’s children. These include:

- **Expanding the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH):** This survey was last conducted in 2007 and is not scheduled again until 2011. As a result, it has not been possible to fully gauge the effects of the severe economic downturn on children. Casey supports the expansion and enhancement of the NSCH, allowing greater frequency of data collection and a broader range of child well-being indicators.
- **Adopting a Supplemental Poverty Measure:** The lack of a modern poverty measure has created a serious gap in the knowledge about how children are faring. The current poverty measure is based on spending patterns typical of the 1950s and doesn’t capture non-cash benefits such as food stamps and child care. The Census Bureau has announced that a supplemental poverty measure will be released in the fall of 2011 that will include an assessment of both family income and expenses, providing more accurate data to guide policy decisions.
- **Increasing the Sample Size of the American Community Survey (ACS):** The ACS could be an even more valuable tool to gauge child well-being measures if the sample size were increased to provide more precise data for urban neighborhoods and sparsely populated rural communities. The Casey Foundation supports an increase in the sample size of this survey that is the primary source of community-level data in the country.

- **Addressing Problems in the Vital Records System:** Over the past few years, significant gaps and delays in compiling key data on health have occurred. This has resulted from years of underinvestment at the National Center for Health, Statistics and difficulty implementing recent changes to birth and death certificates. To rectify these lags, Congress should make a one-time appropriation of \$30 million to help states transition to the new forms, modernize the Vital Statistics system, and then provide additional funds to support this key data stream.

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For 20 years, the West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund has been the state's most trusted source of information about the well-being of children and a leader in the effort to educate parents, policymakers and the public about what young children need to thrive and achieve. KIDS COUNT's signature project is the annual KIDS COUNT Data Book, which tracks key indicators of the health, education, safety and security, and economic conditions of children both on a statewide and county-by-county basis. The Data Book is often the basis of public policy decisions and an important resource for those who seek and award funding from foundations and the private sector.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data launches at 12:01 a.m., July 27, 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.