Kentucky 34th in KIDS COUNT Ranking of Child Well-being

2013 Data Book Reveals Progress and the Need for Stronger Investments in Kentucky Children

Jeffersontown, KY – Kentucky ranks 34th in the nation on overall child well-being, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book. The Data Book shows that kids and families in the Commonwealth gained in the areas of education and health, but more and more families are struggling due to poverty and financial insecurity.

“The good news is that we are making positive and substantial strides in many areas. The take away question from the report is as direct as it is crucial. Will we continue to create better days for Kentucky’s kids through stronger investments in our children?” said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. “The national KIDS COUNT foreword focuses on one critical area for investment – early childhood. Be that pre-school, child care or family supports, supporting early childhood efforts is a common sense approach that pays short and long-term dividends. We certainly know that the early years matter in a number of areas, ranging from learning to health outcomes. That is why recent cuts to the Child Care Assistance Program and the Kinship Care Program stand as a warning signal of regression rather than progress. Those cuts represent a decision that is bad for kids and families in the immediate and – ironically – bad for the state’s bottom line in the long-run.”

The 2013 Data Book ranks states on overall child well-being based on 16 different indicators organized into four domains: Economic Well-Being, Family and Community, Education, and Health. The report also ranks states in each of these areas. Rankings are based off the most recent years of data available. Due to changes in the ranking system in the 2012 Data Book, 2013 rankings can only be compared to 2012 and not to previous years. In addition, the historical trends highlighted for each indicator are derived
from baseline data which date back to pre-recession years. Notable findings from each of these four domains for Kentucky are as follows:

**Economic Well-Being – Kentucky Ranks 32nd:** Kentucky families continue to struggle in economic security as the state worsened on three of the four indicators in this domain since the pre-recession baseline data. One key indicator highlighted in this section is the percent of children living in poverty (income below $22,811 for a family of two adults and two children in 2011), which increased by 23 percent in Kentucky between 2005 and 2011. This means that more than one in four (27 percent) of all Kentucky children now live in poverty. While reducing child poverty will take a multifaceted approach, evidence-based solutions exist that can reduce poverty. One key solution is to restore the recent cuts to the Child Care Assistance and Kinship Care Programs to support working families. Also, enacting a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) would make sure people who work hard are able to meet basic needs, support their families, and stay off welfare. The federal EITC is the nation’s most successful anti-poverty program for children. A state EITC would build on the federal EITC and is a small investment that can make a big difference in the lives of working families.

**Family and Community – Kentucky Ranks 38th:** Also contributing to the high percentage of children living in poverty in Kentucky is the percent of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma or GED. While there is still much room for improvement, Kentucky experienced a 24 percent improvement between 2005 and 2011 on this indicator.

“There is a delicate balance in thinking about a data point such as this,” said Brooks. “On one hand, we should celebrate that kind of improvement. On the other hand, we still rank in the bottom half of states (28th) on this point. That means we have to continue to be persistent and innovative in our approach. That could include engaging unusual allies like faith-based organizations, launching a dropout recovery effort, or increasing the scale and scope of technical and alternative school programming to ensure that diplomas are accessible to especially vulnerable populations.”

**Education – Kentucky Ranks 28th:** Kentucky improved on all of the indicators in the education domain from the pre-recession baseline data. Of particular interest, given the early childhood focus of the foreword, is that 58 percent of children age three to four in 2010-2011 were not enrolled in preschool. As noted earlier, the ties are strong between quality early childhood programs and education, health
and economic security outcomes later in life. Investing in quality early childhood programs, including
child care and preschool, needs to be a priority, as it will pay off in the long term.

**Health – Kentucky Ranks 31:** The state also improved on all four of the indicators in this domain
compared to the pre-recession baseline data. Kentucky particularly progressed on health coverage for
kids, as the number of uninsured children in the state fell by 14 percent between 2008 and 2011. New
health coverage options coming soon will help even more children gain coverage. Beginning in January
2014, expanded Medicaid coverage for adults will likely improve child health as research shows that
when parents have health coverage, they are more likely to enroll their children in health coverage. In
addition, Kentucky’s Healthcare Connection – kynect – which will go live for open enrollment in October
2013, will provide affordable health coverage options for many families who are not eligible for
Medicaid and do not have coverage through an employer.

“We look at these rankings as a call to action instead of just a set of numbers,” added Brooks. “We can
improve the numbers with strong policy and budget decisions, so let’s do more of what we know works.
I look forward to the day where we actually rank first in the nation and Kentucky Youth Advocates’
mission – To make Kentucky the best place in America to be young – is fulfilled. Until then, we need to
celebrate the wins to be sure. But let’s use these numbers as a catalyst to keep working for Kentucky’s
youngest citizens.”

The 2013 **KIDS COUNT Data Book** and a state profile including all 16 indicators for Kentucky will be
available June 24 at 12:01 a.m. in the in the newly redesigned **KIDS COUNT Data Center**, which also
contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being.
**Data Center** users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and
view real-time information on mobile devices.

To access the 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book and the Kentucky profile, visit

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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.*