PRESS RELEASE
EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 AM, EDT, JUNE 24, 2013

CONTACT: Sharon Kayne, Communications Director, NM Voices for Children
505-244-9505 ext. 110 (p), 505-401-8709 (c), 505-244-9509 (f), skayne@nmvoices.org

NM Drops to Dead Last for Child Well-being in 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book
State improves in some areas, worsens in others to slip below Mississippi

ALBUQUERQUE—For the first time New Mexico has fallen to the bottom slot—ranking 50th in the nation in overall child well-being in the 2013 national KIDS COUNT Data Book. Last place has always been taken by Mississippi, which rose to 49th this year for the first time in the publication’s 20-plus year history. Last year, rankings for the two states were reversed with New Mexico at 49th and Mississippi at 50th.

The Data Book released annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranks the 50 states on 16 indicators of child well-being, classified under categories such as Economic Well-Being, Education, and Heath. New Mexico has never ranked above 40th since the Casey Foundation began compiling the data book in 1990.

“This report must serve as a serious wake-up call to New Mexico’s leaders. It’s time to make significant investments in young children. We will continue to rank at the bottom until we make kids our highest priority,” said Veronica C García, Ed.D., Executive Director for New Mexico Voices for Children.

While New Mexico is doing worse in some indicators, the change in rankings is more closely tied to the fact that Mississippi is doing better than they have in years past.

The state’s ongoing inability to recover from the recession is to blame for some of the drop to 50th. New Mexico’s child poverty rate continues to increase, especially for young children. More children are living in single-parent families, which puts them at greater risk for poverty, and more children live in families where neither parent has full-time, year-round employment.

“While investments in young children are essential to improving poor outcomes, these economic indicators tell us that we also need to invest in working parents,” said Dr. García. “Parents need to earn a living wage, and they need adequate work supports like
high-quality, affordable child care. They also need help improving their own educational levels.”

Over the past decade Mississippi saw improvement in two indicators that are key to predicting a children’s educational success—the percentage of children attending preschool and the rate of children whose parents finished high school. New Mexico has not seen improvement in these two indicators.

“More than 60 percent of our children are not attending preschool and 22 percent of our children live in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma. These children will already be behind when they start school and they’ll be unlikely to catch up,” said Dr. García. “If we are ever to improve our graduation rates and see lasting economic development, we must invest in our children before age five,” she added.

NM Voices for Children will release the national data book at their New Mexico KIDS COUNT Conference: 3rd Grade Counts! on Monday, June 24, at the Albuquerque Marriott Pyramid, 5151 San Francisco Rd. NE. The full conference runs from 7:30am-1pm. The press conference to release the data book is 10:05-10:35am.

The 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book, with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data, will be available at 12:01am EDT, June 24, 2013 on the newly revamped KIDS COUNT Data Center at http://datacenter.kidscount.org.


KIDS COUNT is a program of New Mexico Voices for Children and is made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities. 625 Sliver Ave. SW, Suite 195, Albuquerque, NM 87102; 505-244-9505 (p); www.nmvoices.org