PRESS RELEASE

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New Report Shows Texas’ Child Well-Being Slightly Improving, But Is Still Among the 10 Worst States To Be A Kid

(AUSTIN, TEXAS)— New data released today in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2013 National KIDS COUNT data book show that Texas kids were moving in the right direction in child well-being. Although Texas’ overall child well-being ranking relative to other states improved slightly—from 44th in 2012 to 42nd in 2013—Texas still ranks among the 10 worst states to be a kid.

The 2013 National Kids Count report also shows how Texas ranks in four broad well-being categories:

- For economic well-being, our smallest Texans ranked 30th
- Texas’ overall education ranking is 31st
- When it comes to Texas’ child health care, we ranked 36th
- But within family and community, Texas’ ranking was 48th

Each of the four broad categories is created from four specific indicators. When looking at those specific indicators over a longer period of time, the data show that for nine of the 16 indicators, Texas children are indeed doing better than they were a few years before. For example, in the education category, more young kids are attending preschool and more 8th graders are proficient in math. In the health care category, fewer Texas kids are uninsured and our child and teen death rates have declined significantly.

“Improvements in child well-being are definitely what we want to see. Unfortunately, these improvements come with some important caveats,” said Frances Deviney, Texas KIDS COUNT director at the Center for Public Policy Priorities. “The data in this year’s National Kids Count data book reflect child well-being at the end of a period of increased state investments in our kids’ well-being. For many of the data points, the most current data available is from 2011—the year we decided to make massive cuts to investments in kids’ education and health care for 2012 and 2013.”

The significant cuts in critical areas of child well-being come on top of the fact that our kids’ well-being was already becoming worse for seven of the 16 specific indicators. For example, poverty has continued to worsen for Texas kids, even after the recession was over. Approximately 26.2 percent of Texas children live in poverty according to the 2013 report; a significant increase from 2005. Additionally, the percentage of Texas kids who live in high poverty areas also
continues to climb. Because kids living in concentrated poverty have much less access to community and neighborhood resources, they are much less likely to emerge from poverty over time. Texas ranks 48th for this indicator, with approximately one of every six kids living in concentrated poverty.

New research recently released by the Center for Public Policy Priorities supports the link between investments and kids’ outcomes. The research shows that when Texas increased investments in our kids, those investments were related to improved outcomes. When we reduced investments, kids did not tend to do as well.

“Our choices to decimate education funding during the 2011 state legislative session were only slightly improved with this session’s modest funding increases. Unfortunately, these increases do not even get us back to pre-cut funding levels for education and still leave an IOU for health care,” said Deviney. “Doing the bare minimum, like we did during the legislative session we just completed, may keep our kids’ well-being from significant decline but won’t go a long way toward insuring improvements.

"We know what works to build healthy, strong, and economically secure kids,” Deviney said. “It’s time Texas put kids first by making real investments in their future. Doing the bare minimum will keep our kids in the bottom 10—and that’s not where we want, or need, to be.”

— CPPP —

For More Information
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