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2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book Press Release

Richmond – The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2013 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, a comprehensive index measuring child well-being at the national and state level, shows that since roughly 2005, children have experienced gains in educational achievement and health status, while experiencing setbacks in their economic well-being. The KIDS COUNT index covers four categories—Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community—each with four indicators. The 2013 Data Book presents the latest trends, starting pre-recession and ending with the most current data available. The Data Book also ranks states on each of the four categories and on overall child well-being. Virginia’s overall rank improved from 12th to 11th in the nation, continuing a trend that perennially shows Virginia ranked in the top 15 or so states nationwide. Virginia’s rankings on the four separate categories have shown only minor changes in the past year. However, the Commonwealth’s lowest-ranked category continues to be the Health domain at 20th, a decline from a rank of 17 the previous year.

The latest numbers, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, show that although the economy is recovering from the greatest recession since the Great Depression, the economic crisis continues to harm Virginia children and their families. Child poverty and family economic stress, critical factors in the overall well-being of children, have worsened since 2005. Child poverty in Virginia has increased by 15 percent since 2005. In 2011, primarily as a result of the recession, approximately 46,700 additional Virginia children were growing up in poverty, bringing the total number of children in poverty to over 280,000. The figures also indicate that children bear a disproportionate share of the recession’s damaging effects, as the 2011 child poverty rate of 15 percent exceeded the overall state poverty rate of 12.0 percent.

In 2010, Virginia—for the first time—had more than a quarter of a million children in poverty. “The recession may be over, but its aftereffects continue to harm an increasing number of Virginia’s children,” according to Ted Groves, Kids Count director of Voices for Virginia’s Children, a statewide policy and advocacy organization. “The number of children in poverty has grown every year since 2006, and in 2011 another 15,000 were added. We know from previous recessions that children thrown into poverty are likely to remain in poverty several years after a recession ends, with long-term negative consequences.”

Research shows that children in prolonged poverty are more likely to become sick and develop chronic health problems; be absent from school; underachieve academically; develop emotional and behavioral problems; become school drop-outs;
and have low-paying jobs as adults\textsuperscript{1}. According to the Academic Pediatric Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the greatest threat to American children today is the effect of poverty on their health and well-being.

Child poverty in Virginia is not evenly distributed; rates vary widely and are much higher in some locales:

- Only 6.7 percent of children in Northern Virginia live in poverty, versus the statewide average of 15.6 percent. Yet even within that region there are pockets of high child poverty, with rates ranging from 2.9 percent in Falls Church to 16.7 percent in Manassas.
- The Richmond region has a child poverty rate of 16.5 percent, yet ranges from a rate of 7.3 percent in Hanover to 37.7 percent in Petersburg. Similarly, the Hampton Roads-area child poverty rate is 17.6 percent, ranging from 6.8 percent in Poquoson to 28.1 percent in Portsmouth.
- The highest rate of child poverty is found in Southside Virginia, with 27.4 percent of children in poverty. In the region that includes rural Middle Peninsula/Northern Neck communities and the Eastern Shore, the rate reaches 26.3 percent. In Southwest Virginia the rate is 24.4 percent.

Every region of Virginia has substantial child poverty and a higher rate than pre-recession levels, with associated long-term consequences. The effects of child poverty are devastating for children and their families today, but poverty also affects Virginia’s economic future at a time when businesses need a more educated and competent workforce to compete globally. Concerned citizens and community leaders should work together to sound the alarm and help convince policymakers to preserve the safety net programs that mitigate the impact of poverty and help families during tough times. Citizens and leaders can also join child advocacy organizations to insist that Virginia increase its investment in early child development and school readiness initiatives, which are proven to be the most powerful public investments to promote educational success and ensure a capable future workforce.

\textbf{About Voices for Virginia’s Children}

\textit{Voices for Virginia’s Children is a statewide independent, nonpartisan policy research and advocacy organization that champions public policies to improve the lives of Virginia’s children. Voices is home to the Virginia KIDS COUNT Data Center.}

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