



EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 A.M., MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2012

Contact:
Amy Lanctot, alanctot@rikidscount.org
Office: (401) 351-9400, Ext. 22
Cell: (401) 477-6196



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to Release Annual Report on the Well-Being of Rhode Island's Children

Keynote Speaker, Joan Lombardi, Ph.D., Highlights Rhode Island's Work to Improve the Lives of Children and Families

~~~

**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
ONE UNION STATION  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903  
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Warwick, RI (April 2, 2012) - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its eighteenth annual report on the well-being of Rhode Island's children at a policy breakfast attended by over 500 people, including the Governor, members of the Rhode Island Congressional Delegation, General Assembly leaders, community leaders and policymakers from education, health and human services. The event took place on Monday, April 2, 2012, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at the Crossings in Warwick. The *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* charts improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth across the state and in each of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns and provides the latest available statistics on 67 different aspects of children's lives, from birth through adolescence. The Factbook indicators are grouped into five interrelated categories: family and community, economic well-being, health, safety and education.

Joan Lombardi, Ph.D., Former Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, delivered the keynote address, which focused on Rhode Island's proven record of accomplishment for innovative health, family support, and early learning and K-12 education systems that support the health and development of at-risk children and families.

"Rhode Island is one of the states leading the nation when it comes to building a strong system of support for its young children," stated Lombardi. "From improving quality to investing in evidence-based home visiting, and from assuring health insurance to expanding services for at-risk families, Rhode Island stands as a national model for policies and initiatives that protect children and help ensure their future success."

"Over the years, when I thought of Rhode Island, I thought about three things: a state with outstanding leadership inside and outside of government, a state that values and insists upon excellence by using evidence-based programs,

[rikids@rikidscount.org](mailto:rikids@rikidscount.org)  
[www.rikidscount.org](http://www.rikidscount.org)

and a state that always steps up because it cares about improving outcomes for kids.”

Lombardi has spent almost four decades dedicated to the needs of young children and their families. She helped create innovative policies to improve the conditions for children and families and served as the founding chair of the Birth to Five Policy Alliance, a national alliance of organizations dedicated to shifting the odds for the country’s youngest, most vulnerable children.

### **Presentation of the Factbook to State Leaders**

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, opened the policy breakfast by highlighting the progress made in the past year and the challenges that remain. “Safe, healthy and well-educated children are crucial to ensuring the economic success of our state,” stated Bryant. “Today’s children will become tomorrow’s workforce and tomorrow’s parents, which is why it is important to ensure that our children are on a path to succeed.” Bryant then presented the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to Governor Lincoln Chafee, the state’s Congressional Delegation, Senate President Teresa Paiva Weed, House Majority Leader Nicholas Mattiello, and other policymakers and community leaders. “The information presented in the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* will provide our state leaders and policymakers with the facts they need to make well-informed decisions that will protect children and ensure our state’s success as we work toward economic recovery.”

### **New Data from the Latest Census**

The *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* presents new data from the 2010 Census, the most up-to-date information on the number and characteristics of children in Rhode Island and in the state’s 39 cities and towns. The decennial Census shows that the demographics of Rhode Island’s children are changing. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of children in Rhode Island decreased by 10%, from 247,822 to 223,956. Rhode Island was one of only three states to lose at least 10% of its child population during this time period.

Mirroring national trends, Rhode Island’s children are becoming a more racially and ethnically diverse group. In 2010, 64% of Rhode Island’s children were White non-Hispanic, compared with 73% in 2000. The number of minority children grew by about 13,000 between 2000 and 2010, while the number of White non-Hispanic children dropped by over 37,000 during the same period.

### **Four Core Cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket**

Children who live in poverty are most at risk of not achieving their full potential. Between 2006 and 2010, two-thirds (66%) of Rhode Island children living in poverty lived in just four cities. These cities – Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket – are the new four core cities highlighted throughout this year’s Factbook.

“Children live in poverty in every Rhode Island community,” noted Bryant. “However, these communities warrant special attention since more children live in poverty in these four core cities, than in the rest of Rhode Island.” These four core cities have the highest concentration of

childhood poverty in the state, with more than 25% of children living in poverty. In Central Falls 35.8% of children live in poverty, in Pawtucket 27.3% of children live in poverty, in Providence 35.6% of children live in poverty, and in Woonsocket 34.9% of children live in poverty.

The children living in Rhode Island's four core cities are more likely to live in poverty or extreme poverty and face other challenges as well.

- **More infants born at highest risk.** When a child is born to a teenage, unmarried mother who has not graduated from high school, he or she is nine times more likely to grow up in poverty than a child born to a married woman over age 20 with a high school diploma. In Rhode Island in 2011, 286 (6%) infants were born at highest risk in the four core cities, compared to 131 (2%) in the remainder of the state.
- **Higher rates of child abuse and neglect.** The child abuse and neglect rate per 1,000 children under age 18 was almost two times higher in the four core cities (20.7 victims per 1,000 children) compared to the remainder of the state (10.6 victims per 1,000 children).
- **More chronic absenteeism in early grades.** During the 2010-2011 school year, 20% of students in grades K-3 in the four core cities were chronically absent (missed 10% of the school year, or 18 days or more), compared to 8% of students in grades K-3 in the remainder of the state.
- **Higher teen birth rates.** While Rhode Island's teen birth rate has been on the decline, it remains high in the four core cities. Between 2006 and 2010 in Rhode Island, there were 5,384 births to girls ages 15-19. Of these, 64% were babies born to teens in the four core cities.

### Threats to Child Well-Being in Rhode Island

The ongoing recession continues to have a negative impact on Rhode Island, affecting many indicators of children's health, safety and educational attainment.

- **High unemployment.** Rhode Island's December 2011 unemployment rate was 11.0%, third highest in the nation. In 2011, 12% of children in Rhode Island had at least one unemployed parent.
- **Concentrated poverty.** Between 2006 and 2010, 16.7% (37,925) of children under age 18 in Rhode Island lived in poverty. (In 2011, the federal poverty threshold for a family of three with two children was \$18,123.) During the same time period, two-thirds (66%) of children living in poverty in Rhode Island lived in the four core cities.
- **Extreme poverty.** Between 2006 and 2010, 7.4% (16,711) of children under age 18 in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is defined as families with incomes below 50% of the federal poverty threshold, or \$9,062 for a family of three with two children. Of the children living in poverty, 44% lived in extreme poverty.

- **High cost of housing.** Between 2000 and 2011, the average cost of rent in Rhode Island increased by 54%, from \$748 to \$1,150. In 2009, 25% of Rhode Island's 162,539 working households spent more than half their income on housing costs, making Rhode Island the most "housing cost-burdened" state in New England.
- **Homelessness.** In Rhode Island in 2011, 1,092 children in homeless families made up a quarter (25%) of the people who used emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters and transitional housing. More than one-half (54%) of these children were under age six. More than one-half (58%) lived in families that listed one of the four core cities as their last permanent address. In Rhode Island in 2010, 1,150 children in homeless families used shelters or transitional housing.

### **Reducing the Immediate and Long-Term Impact of the Recession on Children**

"As Rhode Islanders continue to struggle with job loss, foreclosure and a lack of affordable housing, it is more important than ever to protect support services and programs that help children and families," stated Bryant. "At the same time we need to continue to make progress in closing the achievement gap that exists at kindergarten entry and to ensure that all children receive the kind of high-quality education that will provide them with the skills they need to succeed in college, careers and life."

- **Child care assistance.** Access to stable, affordable and high-quality child care is a basic need for many working families and is critical for Rhode Island's economy. In Rhode Island a single mother earning the state median income for a single-mother family (\$25,281) would have to spend 45.1% of her income to pay for child care for an infant in center-based care. The Child Care Assistance Program provides assistance on a sliding scale to help with child care so parents can work. In Rhode Island between 2003 and 2010, the number of Rhode Island children with child care subsidies declined from 14,333 to 7,592, with a slight increase to 7,708 in 2011.
- **SNAP/Food Stamps.** Between October 1, 2005 and October 1, 2010, the number of Rhode Island children receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits increased by 81% from 35,168 to 63,783. SNAP participation rates among children increased by 54% in the four core cities and increased by 146% in the remainder of the state.
- **Cash assistance.** Between 2010 and 2011, Rhode Island experienced a small increase in its cash assistance caseload. Still, less than two-thirds (63%) of children living in extreme poverty are in families that receive cash assistance. In 2010, 18,339 children lived in extreme poverty, yet in 2011, only 11,508 children were in families that received cash assistance.
- **Employer-sponsored health insurance.** Employer-sponsored health insurance (ESI) has eroded in Rhode Island over the past decade. During the period of 2008-2010, 60.8% of

- **High school graduation rate.** The four-year high school graduation rate for the class of 2011 was 77%, up from 70% in 2007. Adults who graduate from high school are less likely to be unemployed and have higher incomes than adults without high school diplomas. Between 2008 and 2010, the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders with high school diplomas was 9.5%, compared to 13.8% for those without diplomas. Between 2008 and 2010, the median income of Rhode Island adults with high school diplomas or GEDs was \$30,046, compared to \$21,743 for those without high school degrees.

### Improvements in Child Well-Being

While Rhode Island's children are still facing challenges, progress is apparent in many important areas, including safety, health and education.

- **Fewer youth held at Rhode Island Training School.** A total of 669 youth (84% male and 16% female) were in the care or custody of the Training School at some point during 2011, down from 821 in 2010. The Department of Children, Youth and Families' (DCYF) probation caseload also has declined, from 982 on January 4, 2011 to 796 on January 1, 2012. Alternatives to incarcerating youth have been shown to be more successful in preventing recidivism and more cost-effective than incarceration.
- **The number of children in out-of-home placements decreased.** As of December 31, 2011, there were 1,988 children under age 21 in the care of DCYF who were in out-of-home placements, a 40% decrease from 3,311 in 2006.
- **Teen births declined in Rhode Island and in the United States.** The teen birth rate in Rhode Island and the United States has dropped significantly since the early 1990s. Rhode Island's teen birth rate was 26.8 per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 in 2009, down from 44.7 in 1991. The United States' teen birth rate was 39.1 per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 in 2009, down from 61.8 in 1991.
- **Obesity rates improved.** Nearly one in six (17.1%) Rhode Island children entering kindergarten during the 2010-2011 school year was obese, down from a high of 20.3% in the 2004-2005 school year.
- **More children visited a dentist.** Half (52%) of the children who were enrolled in RIte Care, RIte Share or Medicaid fee-for-service on June 30, 2011 received a dental service during State Fiscal Year 2011, up from 43% in State Fiscal Year 2005. The number of dentists accepting qualifying children with Medical Assistance coverage in Rhode Island increased

from 27 participating providers before RIte Smiles to 90 (at the launch of RIte Smiles) in September 2006, to 370 in September 2011.

- **Quality improvements made in child care and early learning programs.** BrightStars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs, provides support and accountability for child care and early learning programs striving to meet research-based program quality benchmarks. Twelve percent of all programs now have a star rating. In 2011, BrightStars awarded star rating increases to 25 programs that made significant quality improvements.
- **State Pre-K program receives national recognition.** Rhode Island's State Pre-K program, with seven classrooms in four urban communities, is one of only five Pre-K programs in the nation that meets all recommended quality benchmarks. The program is included in the state's education funding formula, which will support statewide expansion, starting first with low-income communities.
- **Full-day kindergarten programs increase.** In the 2011-2012 school year, 64% of Rhode Island kindergarteners were in full-day programs. This all-time high is a major increase since 1999-2000, when only 18% of students were in full-day programs, but is still below the national percentage of 74%.
- **Reading proficiency gains continued.** In October 2011, 77% of Rhode Island eighth graders scored at or above proficiency in reading on the NECAP, an increase from 56% in 2005. Proficiency levels increased between 2005 and 2011 across the state. The greatest gains were made in the four core cities, where eighth-grade reading proficiency rates increased from 30% to 57% between 2005 and 2011.

“The data highlighted in this year’s Factbook show that while the financial crisis, job loss and underemployment have taken a toll on families across Rhode Island, great progress is still being made,” noted Bryant. “As the economy struggles to rebound, it is especially important to continue to make the health and well-being of Rhode Island’s children, families and communities a high priority for strategic public investments and policies. Our state’s economic recovery and future prosperity depends on children and youth that have the education and skills they need to lead the way in the new economy.”

~ ~ ~

*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island’s children.*