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Embargoed until 12:01am on Tuesday, December 15, 2015.

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## ***Young Children in the Child Welfare System: New Issue Brief from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT***

*In Rhode Island and nationally, young children under age 6 are more likely to experience maltreatment (abuse or neglect) than older children.*

*Maltreatment by parents or other caregivers during early childhood can result in short-term harm and long-term negative outcomes*

**Providence, RI:** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest *Issue Brief* – *Young Children in the Child Welfare System* – at a policy roundtable on Tuesday, December 15, 2015 from 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, will provide welcoming remarks, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analysts Leanne Barrett and John Neubauer will present highlights from the *Issue Brief*.

Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Roberts, Secretary, RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Jamia McDonald, Chief Strategy Officer, RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services; and Susan Dickstein, PhD, Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant, Bradley Hospital and Associate Professor, Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

At the policy roundtable, policy makers, state agencies, and community members will discuss young children in the child welfare system in Rhode Island, as well as recommendations for keeping them safe and meeting their developmental needs.

### **Devastating Consequences of Child Maltreatment**

Safe, stable, nurturing relationships in the first years of life are fundamental for healthy brain development. Child maltreatment (neglect or abuse) disrupts the development of the brain and biological systems, and can result in short-term harm and long-term negative outcomes such as depression, substance abuse, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviors, suicide, and certain chronic diseases.

"The clock is ticking on these vulnerable young children. There is no question that abuse and neglect can impair a child's brain development and have disastrous long-term consequences," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "The immediate safety and future well-being of young children in the child welfare system is at stake. Every child needs a family and a safe place to call home."

## **Child Maltreatment in Rhode Island: A Data Snapshot**

The latest *Issue Brief* provides an overview of child maltreatment in Rhode Island, and how the child welfare system responds to maltreatment. Key highlights include:

- During FFY 2015, there were 3,367 child maltreatment reports for children under age six that resulted in 3,270 completed investigations by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), the state agency responsible for responding to child abuse and neglect. During this time:
  - There were 1,450 victims of maltreatment under age six.
  - The vast majority (85%) of indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of maltreatment of children under age six involved neglect, 11% involved physical abuse, and 1% involved sexual abuse.
  - The largest category of neglect (41%) is lack of supervision. The second largest category of neglect (35%) is “exposure to domestic violence.”
- The *Issue Brief* includes a chart: “*How does the child welfare system respond to abuse and neglect?*” Please see pages 4 and 5 for this overview of how cases can proceed through Rhode Island’s child welfare system.
- The *Issue Brief* also provides information on foster families, which provide family settings for children who have been removed from their homes.
  - In Rhode Island, 60% of children under age six placed in foster care are in kinship foster care (relative or non-relative) and 40% are in non-kinship care.
  - There were 540 licensed foster homes in Rhode Island as of September 30, 2015.
  - One-third (34%) of foster homes caring for Rhode Island children are located in the four core cities, while 52% of victims of child maltreatment (among children of all ages) lived in one of the four core cities.
- The *Issue Brief* also provides key recommendations for keeping young children in the child welfare system safe and meeting their developmental needs. Please see page 11 for the full set of recommendations.

“Every child deserves the chance for a safe, healthy and bright future—especially our most vulnerable children,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Elizabeth Roberts. “From our work to overhaul operations at the state’s Department of Children, Youth and Families to our efforts to improve coordination and service delivery through the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, we are focusing on innovating government to improve outcomes for kids. We are lucky to have strong partnerships with organizations like Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, who are helping us to build from a place of strength in this work.”

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*[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 children.*