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UNDER EMBARGO until Tuesday June 21, 2016, 12:01 a.m. EDT
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Rhode Island Among “Most Improved” States for Child Well-Being in New National Report

2016 Data Book finds R.I. youth are healthier and completing high school on time despite facing future limited by economic inequality, unaffordable higher education

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (June 21, 2016) – The 2016 annual national *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a state-by-state report on children’s well-being issued by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, finds that Rhode Island ranks 27th in the nation for overall child well-being (1st is best and 50th is worst), up from a ranking of 31st last year. Rhode Island ranked last in New England, below Massachusetts (2), New Hampshire (4), Connecticut (5), Vermont (6) and Maine (17).

“We are pleased to see that Rhode Island ranks sixth best in the nation on child health measures,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of [Rhode Island KIDS COUNT](#). “We have more work to do to improve our overall rank of 27th by reducing childhood poverty and accelerating progress on education outcomes.”

Rhode Island’s national rankings for child well-being in 2016

- Rhode Island ranks 27th among states, up from a ranking of 31st in 2015.
- Rhode Island was among the six states with the biggest improvements in overall rankings (along with Montana, South Dakota, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming).

State rankings are based on an index of 16 indicators in four key areas:

- *Health:* Rhode Island ranks sixth (*improvement from 12th in 2015*)
- *Education:* Rhode Island ranks 25th (*decrease from 24th in 2015*)
- *Family and Community:* Rhode Island ranks 30th (*improvement from 33rd in 2015*)
- *Economic Well-Being:* Rhode Island ranks 34th (*improvement from 36th in 2015*)

Selected indicators of child well-being in Rhode Island

Decrease in child poverty (Economic Well-Being)

In 2014, 20 percent of Rhode Island children lived in poverty, down from 22 percent in 2013 but up from 15 percent in 2008, at the start of the recession.

Decrease in children living in families without secure parental employment (Economic Well-Being)

In 2014, 32 percent of children in Rhode Island were living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment, a decrease from 34 percent the year prior.

Decrease in the percentage of children living in households with a high housing cost burden (Economic Well-Being)

In 2014, 42 percent of Rhode Island children lived in households with a high housing cost burden, down from 43 percent the year prior. Households with a high housing cost burden are defined as those that spend more than 30 percent of their pretax income on housing, whether they are renters or homeowners.

Rhode Island continues to have a low percentage of uninsured children (Health)

In Rhode Island in 2014, 3 percent of children did not have health insurance, down from 5 percent in 2013. Rhode Island is ranked third in the nation for this indicator.

Rhode Island's teen birth rate continues to fall (Family and Community)

Following national trends, in 2014, the teen birth rate was 16 births per 1,000 teen girls in Rhode Island, down from 18 per 1,000 the previous year.

Decrease in the number of children in families without a high school diploma (Family and Community)

In 2014, 12 percent of Rhode Island children lived in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma, down from 14 percent in 2013.

Room for progress in reading and math proficiency (Education)

In 2015, 60 percent of fourth graders scored below proficient in reading and 68 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in math. While there is room for improvement in these proficiency levels, this is an improvement from 2007, when 69 percent of fourth graders were below proficient in reading and 72 percent of eighth graders were below proficient in math.

National trends

The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that teenagers of Generation Z – the rising cohort born after 1995 that follows the Millennials – broke records in education and health indicators despite growing up in the midst of the economic downturn. Improvements in the teen birth rate, the percentage of teens abusing alcohol and drugs, and graduation rates nationally were mirrored in Rhode Island.

These improvements are remarkable given the economic challenges faced by far too many of their families, according to the *2016 Data Book*. Despite rising employment numbers, 22 percent of children lived in poverty in 2014. While navigating their own family challenges, an increasing number of children and youth are also growing up in neighborhoods that lack the resources they need to thrive. Since 2006-2010, the number of children living in high poverty areas across the country increased to 14 percent, up from 11 percent.

“This generation of teenagers and young adults are coming of age in the wake of the worst economic climate in nearly 80 years, and yet they are achieving key milestones that are critical for future success,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “With more young people making smarter decisions, we must fulfill our part of the bargain, by providing them with the educational and economic opportunity that youth deserve. We urge candidates in state and

national campaigns to describe in depth their proposals to help these determined young people realize their full potential.”

National and State Rankings for the 2016 Data Book

- Top Five States Overall: Minnesota, Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire, Connecticut
- Bottom Five States Overall: Alabama, Nevada, Louisiana, New Mexico, Mississippi
- The biggest improvements in overall rankings compared to last year’s Data Book are in Montana, **Rhode Island**, South Dakota, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming.
- The biggest drops in overall rankings are in Alaska, Maine, Maryland , Kansas.

Bipartisan solutions based on American values

In the *2016 Data Book*, the Casey Foundation offers a number of recommendations for how policy makers can ensure all children are prepared for the future, based on this country’s shared values of opportunity, responsibility and security.

- **OPPORTUNITY:** Increase opportunity by expanding access to high-quality pre-k and early childhood services so that all children are prepared to succeed in school. In addition, expand access to higher education and training so that every low-income child has a fair chance to develop his or her potential.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers who do not have dependent children. This strategy will bolster workers, who may in fact be helping to support children who do not live with them and who are struggling to get by on low wages.
- **SECURITY:** Policies can ensure American families have a measure of security, particularly low-income parents of young children, by providing paid family leave that helps them balance their obligations at home and in the workplace.

The *2016 Data Book* will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://databook.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety, and development of Rhode Island’s children and youth. It is one of fifty state-level organizations that work in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the social condition of children at the state and local level across the country.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.