



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
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For Immediate Release

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According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data released today, 17.5% of Rhode Island children under age 18 lived in poverty in 2007, up from 15.1% in 2006.

In 2007, 18.0% of all children in the United States lived in poverty, compared with 18.3% in 2006.

6.9% of Rhode Island children were uninsured in the three year period from 2005-2007, compared with 6.4% of children in 2004-2006. Rhode Island ranks 11th in the nation for children's health insurance coverage.

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**Providence, RI, August 26, 2008** – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released new data from the U.S. Census Bureau's *2007 American Community Survey* (ACS) showing the extent of child poverty in Rhode Island and the nation and new data on children's health insurance from the *2007 Current Population Survey* (CPS).

### **Children Living in Poverty**

The new Census data show that the child poverty rate in Rhode Island was 17.5% in 2007, an increase from 15.1% in 2006. Rhode Island now ranks 20<sup>th</sup> in the country for child poverty (where 1<sup>st</sup> is best), a drop from last year when Rhode Island ranked 17<sup>th</sup>. The poverty data for 2007 are based on the federal poverty threshold of \$16,705 a year for a family of three. Nationally, the 2007 child poverty rate for children under age 18 was 18.0% compared to 18.3% in 2006.

Census data indicate that the total number of Rhode Island children living in poverty increased from 35,456 children under age 18 in 2006 to 40,468 children in 2007. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT noted, "Poverty is related to every area of child well-being. It is critical that as a state and as a nation we ensure that parents have the education, skills and opportunities to have jobs that pay enough to support

their families. We know what works to ameliorate the worst effects of poverty. Continued state and federal investments in health care, child care and early education are critical to healthy child development.”

The Census data released today also show that 7.6% of Rhode Island children (17,697 children) were living in extreme poverty, defined as one-half of the federal poverty level or \$8,353 a year for a family of three. While almost half of Rhode Island children living in poverty are White, children of color are far more likely to live below the federal poverty level. In 2007, 42% of Hispanic children, 29% of Asian children, and 26% of Black children in Rhode Island lived in families with incomes below the poverty level, compared with 12% of White children.

### **Children’s Health Insurance Coverage**

Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s *Current Population Survey*, 6.9% of Rhode Island children were uninsured in the three-year period from 2005 -2007. This is 16,667 Rhode Island children under the age of 18. This compares to 6.4% uninsured Rhode Island children in 2004-2006. Rhode Island ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation for children’s health insurance coverage. Comparable U.S. data based on three-year averages from the *Current Population Survey* show that the U.S. rate of uninsured children was 11.2% in 2005-2007 and 11.0% in 2004-2006. The current three-year average is an increase in the percentage of uninsured children in Rhode Island when compared to 2002-2004, when only 5.5% of Rhode Island children were uninsured.

Nationally, the percentage of uninsured children reported by the Census Bureau today shows that the number of uninsured children in the U.S. fell by 500,000 to 8.1 million children between 2006 and 2007. Bryant noted, “States across the nation are making gains in children’s health insurance coverage. Rhode Island has long been a leader in children’s health insurance coverage. Although the state is facing challenging budget times, RItE Care has been a nationally recognized policy success story. Protecting our long-term investment in RItE Care is crucial so that we can make sure that all kids in Rhode Island have the health care they need for healthy child development.”

In Rhode Island in 2007, there were 166,000 Rhode Island children under age 18 who were covered by private health insurance (including employer-sponsored coverage) and 71,000 Rhode Island children who were covered by government insurance (including Medicaid, RItE Care, Medicare and military insurance). Bryant noted that, “While the majority of children in

Rhode Island have health coverage through their parents' employer, RItE Care plays an important role in making sure that families who can't access affordable insurance through employers can get the coverage that they need to grow, learn and be healthy.”

Research shows that insured children are more likely than uninsured children to receive preventive care and have a regular health care provider. Children with health insurance are more likely to receive treatment for health conditions such as asthma and ear infections, that if left untreated can have life-long consequences and lead to more serious health problems. Much of Rhode Island's success in increasing access to health insurance and comprehensive health care for children is due to RItE Care, Rhode Island's Medicaid managed care program for low-income working families that covers about one-third of Rhode Island's children.

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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.