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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:**

***Central Falls and Pawtucket Data in Your Backyard***

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**Pawtucket, RI, June 15, 2006** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst, Kat Keenan will present data from the *2006 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to an audience of community leaders on **June 15<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at netWORKri, 175 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI.** As part of the *Data in Your Backyard Series* being held in communities across the state, the presentation will include indicators of child well-being in Central Falls and Pawtucket and there will be a community discussion about the data's implications.

**Health**

The data show that both Central Falls and Pawtucket are experiencing some positive trends in health outcomes. Even with that progress, many of the outcomes lag behind the rest of the state. For example, the percentage of children with a history of blood lead levels  $\geq 10\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$  in Central Falls decreased by 24% over the last year from 17.2% to 13.0%. Yet, this rate is nearly double the state rate of 7.4%. Also in health, fewer women in both Central Falls and Pawtucket are receiving delayed prenatal care compared to a decade ago, yet Central Falls has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest percentage of women with delayed prenatal care in the state (15.0%) and Pawtucket has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest rate (12.5%). The state rate for delayed prenatal care is 9.1%. Kat Keenan, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, noted, "The persistently high percentage of women in Central Falls and Pawtucket who do not receive timely prenatal care is cause for concern and action. Comprehensive prenatal care can effectively intervene with a range of social and economic conditions that can lead to poor outcomes for the mother and her child. We need to continue our wise investments in health care and improve access to comprehensive prenatal care for all women."

## **Births to Teens**

A clear issue that needs to be addressed in order to improve the economic, health and education outcomes for children in Central Falls and Pawtucket is the high rate of births to teens in these two communities. While the teen birth rate for girls ages 15-17 in Central Falls has decreased by 25% over the last decade, the teen birth rate in Central Falls continues to be more than three times the state rate. The Central Falls rate is 62.9 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17 compared to the state rate of 20.0 births per 1,000 teen girls in this age range. In Pawtucket the teen birth rate also decreased over the last decade, yet at 30.4 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17 continues to be well above the state rate. Over the last five years, 325 babies were born to girls ages 15 to 17 in Central Falls and Pawtucket. Many of these children will arrive at school without the cognitive and social skills to be successful students and will struggle throughout their school career.

## **High School Graduation**

In Central Falls only 63% of students graduated from high school and only 34% of students took the SATs, a prerequisite for college entry. In Pawtucket, 71% of students graduated from high school and 46% took the SATs. Central Falls and Pawtucket also have a significantly higher rate of mothers with low levels of education at the time of birth. In Central Falls, 38% of new mothers had less than a high school diploma, compared to 21% of new mothers in Pawtucket and 15% statewide. Research shows strong links between parental education levels and a child's health, the level of education the child will ultimately achieve and future earning potential.

## **Education as a Tool to Reduce Childhood Poverty**

Both communities continue to struggle with high rates of childhood poverty. Children in poverty are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents and earn less as adults. Data from *Census 2000* show that Central Falls has the highest child poverty rate in the state at 40.9%, compared to 16.9% for Rhode Island. Of the 2,210 children in Central Falls who live below the poverty threshold (\$15,219 for a family of three), more than half (52%) live in extreme poverty, which is defined as income at or below half of the federal poverty line (or \$7,610 for a family of three). In Pawtucket, 25.3% of children lived below the poverty threshold, the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate in the state. Almost half (48%) of the 4,542 children in Pawtucket living in poverty lived in extreme poverty.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT issued a call to action, noting, “We need to be concerned with the low high school graduation rates and the high rates of teen pregnancy in Central Falls and Pawtucket, as well as other communities in the state. These factors compromise the development of these young people and prevent them from reaching their full potential. Educational attainment is the surest path to long-term economic progress for families and communities.”

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