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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases
Annual Factbook on the Status of Rhode Island's Children**

**Latest data highlight the need for continued investments in
education, child care and health care**

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**Warwick, RI, April 3, 2006** – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its annual report on the well-being of Rhode Island's children today. In releasing the latest available statistics on 60 different aspects of children's lives, from birth through adolescence, the annual *2006 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* charts improvements and declines in the well-being of children across the state and in each of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns. The Factbook indicators are grouped into five interrelated categories: family and community, economic well-being, health, safety and education. A new indicator this year highlights the need for public investments in the types of high-quality family support programs that have been shown to improve the life chances of infants at highest risk for poor outcomes, including the 639 Rhode Island babies born in 2004 to young unmarried women under age 20 with less than a high school education.

Tamara Lucas Copeland, President of Voices for America's Children, gave remarks that highlighted the urgent need to maintain and strengthen state and federal investments in families and children. "We must be vigilant in our work to ensure that federal and state resources are used to improve the health, education and development of our children. Public investments in children and their families are a key factor in the quality of life in our communities and our nation." Voices for America's Children is a national nonpartisan nonprofit organization that coordinates a nationwide network of state and local child advocacy organizations in the United States.

Since 1984, Voices for America's Children has been committed to speaking out for the well-being of children at the federal, state and local levels of government. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a member of Voices for America's Children.

**High-quality education is critical for moving children and families out of poverty.**

Data from the *2006 Factbook* show that higher levels of education typically lead to higher earnings. In 2004, men and women with a college degree or higher earned two times more than those with less than a high school diploma. "The children most at risk of not achieving their full potential are children who live in poverty. Education is the one clear pathway out of poverty," remarked Elizabeth Burke Bryant. "One in five children in Rhode Island is growing up poor. We urgently need to ensure that these children have high-quality public education from pre-kindergarten through college."

Chace Baptista, a youth speaker at the breakfast, also highlighted the importance of education and emphasized how important it is for youth to have adults who believe in them, challenge them and support them. Mr. Baptista, a student at the Community College of Rhode Island, noted, "It is important that a serious investment is made in mentoring youth, especially youth who may not have support at home. The support I received through Youth in Action was critical to my development into a successful adult."

*Graduation rates:* Young adults who drop out of high school are three times more likely to be unemployed or earn lower wages than those with a high school degree. In 2005 in Rhode Island, 85% of all students graduated from high school, including 88% of White students, 81% of Asian students, 79% of Black students, 74% of Hispanic students and 72% of Native American students. "Our high school graduation rates are unacceptable. Only 85% of all Rhode Island students statewide graduate and only 72% of students in the core cities graduate. We need to increase our high school graduation rate across the board. In today's economy, young people absolutely require a high school diploma and additional higher education or career training in order to compete," stated Ms. Bryant.

*School attendance rates:* An important aspect of students' access to education is the amount of time actually spent in the classroom. In the 2004-2005 school year, nearly one out of four (24%) students in the core cities missed over 20 days of school, compared to one out of ten (10%)

students in the remainder of Rhode Island and nearly one out of seven (15%) students statewide.

*4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading scores:* Math and reading proficiency are fundamental to the development of academic competencies and basic life skills. According to the *2005 National Assessment of Education Progress*, 41% of Rhode Island low-income fourth-graders scored at or above basic understanding in reading proficiency compared to 74% of higher-income fourth-graders. In 2004, Rhode Island eighth-graders were significantly less proficient according to the state's math assessment than fourth graders statewide. According to the *2004 New Standards Reference Exam*, 51% of Rhode Island fourth-grade students were proficient in math compared to 40% of eighth-grade students statewide. (Note: The 2004 data was the best available data at the time that the Factbook went to press. 2005 data based on a new state assessment test has recently been released by the Rhode Island Department of Education.)

*Housing Mobility:* Costly housing has a negative impact on children's education because many families move frequently due to the high costs of housing. Changing schools causes disruption in a child's learning. Strong evidence exists that mobility during elementary and high school can decrease students test scores and grade point averages, increase the chance of that a student will be held back a grade and reduce the chance that a student will graduate. The *2006 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* contains new data on student stability and student mobility within each school district.

*Full-day kindergarten:* Children in full-day kindergarten programs are more likely to be ready for first grade than children in half-day programs. In Rhode Island in 2005-2006, 47% of children who attended kindergarten were in a full-day program. As of the 2005-2006 school year, 12 of 36 school districts offered universal access to full-day programs.

*Comprehensive early childhood programs for children at risk:* Early childhood programs such as Early Intervention and Early Head Start play an important role in protecting and nurturing children and promoting their social-emotional and cognitive development. In 2005 in Rhode Island, 8% of the 37,775 Rhode Island children under age 3 received Early Intervention Services, a program for infants and toddlers at risk for developmental delays or disabilities. During 2005, 5% (390) of the estimated income-eligible children under age 3 received

Early Head Start services, a comprehensive program for infants and toddlers at risk of poor outcomes. According to the *2006 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*, many children who would benefit from comprehensive, intensive early childhood programs are not enrolled. For example, only 91 of the 672 infants and toddlers who are in the care of DCYF received a referral to Early Intervention in 2005, despite a federal law that requires a comprehensive assessment for this vulnerable group of young children. Statewide, Early Head Start has the capacity to serve only 5% of the infants and toddlers (birth through age 2) who are eligible and Head Start has the capacity to serve only half (52%) of pre-school children (ages 3 and 4) who are eligible.

**Supports for working families ameliorate the worst effects of poverty and improve outcomes for children.**

According to the *2004 American Community Survey* conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of children living in poverty in Rhode Island increased from 16% in 2000 to 21% in 2004. In 2004, 50,390 Rhode Island children lived below the poverty threshold (\$15,735 for a family of three with two children). Thirty-two percent (16,326) of these children are under the age of 6. More than half (54%) of all children under age 18 living below the poverty threshold, live in extreme poverty (below 50% of the poverty threshold or \$7,868 for a family of three with two children).

Yet despite rising poverty rates, Rhode Island's children are healthier today – on nearly all health measures – than when the first Factbook was released. “Rhode Island's investment in RItE Care is paying off in improvements in children's health. Rhode Island has the second lowest rate of uninsured children in the country. We also rank among the best in the country for women receiving timely prenatal care and for infants and toddlers being fully immunized. It is critical that we preserve the investments we have made in insuring all of Rhode Island's children, including undocumented children. Children without health insurance often have poorer school attendance and lower school achievement. We also know from research that children are more likely to use health care when their parents are insured and have access to health care,” noted Ms. Bryant.

*Child Care Subsidies:* Rhode Island's investments in child care subsidies help low-income working families to afford the cost of child care. Child care subsidies broaden a family's employment options and child care options, including improving access to higher quality care.

The number of children receiving child care subsidies increased steadily from 6,077 in December of 1996 to 14,333 in 2003. There was a 12% decrease since 2003 in the number children receiving child care subsidies (12,666 in 2005). In December 2005, four out of five child care subsidies in Rhode Island were being used by low-income working families not receiving cash assistance from the Family Independence Program (FIP). Fifteen percent were used by families enrolled in the FIP who were working or receiving education and training and another 6% were used for children in the care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

### *Welfare to Work*

The Family Independence Program (FIP) was designed to help families make successful transitions to work and provide for the healthy development of children. Since 1995, the number of FIP cash assistance recipients has declined by 46%. Access to child care has been a key factor in maintaining stable employment and reducing the welfare caseload. In December 2005 there were a total of 12,072 FIP cases; of these, more than one-third (4,081) were child only cases. Eighty-three percent of the 4,829 families required to engage in a work activity were in compliance, with nearly 2 in 5 (38%) of these families employed, 25% in approved education or training and 20% preparing an employment plan or completing an activity. In 2005, approximately 50% of all cases that close do so because of employment. For those families remaining on assistance research shows that many face multiple barriers to employment, including physical and mental health problems, housing instability, seasonal work, temporary or part-time jobs, transportation problems or inability to find a job.

Ms. Bryant noted, "It is important to acknowledge the critical investments that Rhode Island has made over the years in vital supports for working families, including access to affordable, high-quality child care, health care and education. The data show that these investments are working to improve the health and well-being of Rhode Island's children. Proposed cuts to Rite Care, child care and FIP threaten the well-being of our state's most vulnerable citizens. We know what works to help ameliorate poverty and to ensure that when children grow up they do not become poor heads of households. Even in difficult budget times we need to remain committed to these proven investments and strategies."

## **Presentation of Factbook to Key Leaders**

After highlighting the progress and challenges facing Rhode Island's children, Bryant presented the *2006 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to the Governor, the state's congressional delegation, the leadership of the General Assembly and other community leaders. Ms. Bryant noted, "I am proud of the strides that we have made on behalf of children in Rhode Island, but we still have work to do. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is committed to sustaining the gains we have made together and to working with each of you to make additional progress so that all children have what they need to thrive."

*Attached is an embargoed copy of the 2006 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook, fact sheets summarizing data for Rhode Island as a whole as well as for your coverage area, and the press advisory.*

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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 children. The organization is one of fifty-three state-level organizations that works 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 annual *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* is produced by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT in partnership with The Rhode Island Foundation and the United Way of Rhode Island.