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For Immediate Release

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents: *Pawtucket Data in Your Backyard*

The data on child well-being in Pawtucket show some encouraging trends in recent years in both health and education. Improvements are seen in education results for 4th grade reading proficiency and high school graduation rates, yet outcomes still fall below the state as a whole.

Continued concern for high rates of teen pregnancy that lead to poor outcomes for teen parents and their children.

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Pawtucket, RI, June 5, 2008 - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Research Analyst, Elaine Budish, presented data from the *2008 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to an audience of community leaders, parents and policy makers. The presentation included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Pawtucket. A community discussion followed the presentation about the implications of the data and the opportunities to improve outcomes for children in the community. The presentation was hosted locally by the Rhode Island Parent Information Network and was held on **Thursday, June 5, 2008 from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.** at the **Blackstone Valley Visitor Center Theater**, 175 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI.

“The data on child well-being in Pawtucket show some encouraging trends in recent years in both health and education. The infant mortality rate and lead poisoning rates are down significantly. We are seeing gradual improvements in 4th grade reading scores and high school graduation rates. Nonetheless, some trends are going in the wrong direction. The rate of births to girls ages 15-19 is the 3rd highest in the state, compromising the futures of Pawtucket teens and their children,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

According to *Census 2000*, there were 18,151 children under the age of 18 in Pawtucket, a 9% increase from 1990. The child population in Pawtucket is racially and ethnically diverse.

According to the race and ethnicity categories defined by *Census 2000*, 56% of children in Pawtucket are White, non-Hispanic, 10% are Black, non-Hispanic, 21% are Hispanic, and 1% are Asian; 7% identified as “Some Other Race” and 6% identified as “Two or More Races.”

Economic Well-Being

Of the 18,151 children living in Pawtucket, 25.3% (4,542) lived in poverty. In 2007, the poverty line was \$16,705 a year for a family of three. Yet the cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Pawtucket is \$1,096 a month, consuming more than three-quarters of the income of a family earning wages at the poverty level.

Access to food programs – such as Food Stamps and School Breakfast – ameliorate some of the effects of poverty on low-income children. Children who participate in these programs are less likely to experience hunger and are more likely to have better nutrition, which is important to their healthy development and educational performance. The rate of income-eligible children participating in the Food Stamp Program is 76% in Pawtucket, compared to 74% statewide. Pawtucket offers the School Breakfast Program to all children in public schools. Students who eat breakfast have significantly higher math and reading scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness and lower incidences of social and behavioral problems. An average of 1,610 (25%) low-income children in Pawtucket participated in the School Breakfast Program each day in October 2007, out of 6,506 who were eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast. The School Breakfast Program participation rate in Pawtucket is lower than the state rate of 29%.

Children living in single-parent families are at increased risk of poverty. In 2000, 42% of children in Pawtucket were living in single-parent households, compared with the state rate of 30%.

Children living in single-parent families are at increased risk of living in poverty, they are also more likely to have low levels of social and emotional well-being, increased levels of depression and stress, and low academic achievement.

Health

Pawtucket has progressed but still faces challenges in improving some indicators of health. The infant mortality rate in Pawtucket has decreased from 8.7 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1997-2001 to 6.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002-2006. This is very close to the state infant

mortality rate of 6.2. The percentage of Pawtucket children entering kindergarten having screened positive for lead poisoning decreased significantly from 20.7% in the class entering kindergarten in 1999 to 4.7% in the kindergarten class that will enter in 2009.

Between 2002 and 2006, 13.5% of births in Pawtucket were to women receiving delayed prenatal care, up from a low of 12.5% in 2000-2004. The percentage of women with delayed prenatal care is now the 4th highest in the state and higher than the statewide rate of 10.7%. Women receiving late or no prenatal care are at increased risk of poor birth outcomes, such as preterm births and low birthweight. An infant's birthweight is a key indicator of newborn health and is directly related to infant survival and healthy development. Between 1997-2001 and 2002-2006, the percentage of infants born with low birthweight in Pawtucket increased steadily from 7.8% to 8.7%, similar to the state trend during this period. Statewide, the percentage of infants born with low birthweight increased from 7.4% to 8.1%.

There are strong links between parental education levels and a child's school readiness, health and the level of education the child is likely to achieve. Between 2002 and 2006, 21% of new mothers in Pawtucket had less than a high school diploma, significantly higher than the state rate of 15%. In 2007 in Pawtucket, 7% of babies were born at highest risk (their mothers were under age 20, unmarried, and had less than 12 years of education), compared to 5% statewide.

Teen Pregnancy and Parenting

Pawtucket has the third highest rate of births to teen girls ages 15-19. Between 2002 and 2006, Pawtucket had a teen birth rate of 57.2 births per every 1,000 girls ages 15-19, significantly higher than the statewide rate of 30.4 births per 1,000 teen girls in that age group. Elaine Budish, Research Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT noted, "Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children. Children born to teens are more likely to suffer poor health, experience learning and behavior problems, live in poverty, be incarcerated, or become teen parents themselves." Research shows that pregnancy prevention is best addressed by using a multi-strategy approach that meets the developmental needs of teens, provides opportunities to achieve in school, builds career and leadership skills, offers accurate information about sex and sexuality, and increases access to reproductive health care services.

In the five years between 2002 and 2006, there were 220 births to Pawtucket teens ages 15-17 and 430 births to Pawtucket teens ages 18-19. The rate of births to younger teens in Pawtucket is 32.3 per 1,000 girls ages 15-17, compared to 19.1 statewide. The majority of teen births in Pawtucket occur in older teens. There were 94.7 births per every 1,000 girls ages 18-19 in Pawtucket, compared to 43.2 statewide. Ms. Budish stated, "Outcomes for slightly older teens are not much better than for younger teens. Research shows that families who delay child bearing until their mid-to-late 20s are more likely to have better education and economic status and have children who are healthier and more successful in school."

Safety

In Pawtucket, there has been a slight decrease in the rate of indicated investigations of child abuse and neglect over the past 5 years. In 2003, the child abuse and neglect rate was 11.2 per 1,000 children which decreased to 10.1 in 2007, still higher than the state rate of 7.8 per 1,000 children. Elizabeth Burke Bryant noted, "Preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to helping children grow into strong, healthy, productive adults and good parents. Responding to reports of child abuse and neglect, and ensuring child safety are important functions of child protection systems. Building the capacity to focus on prevention is more cost-effective and equally critical."

Education

High-quality early education is critical for moving children out of poverty and providing the foundation for success in school. Children in low-income communities benefit from access to high-quality Head Start and early education programs that build important cognitive and social skills. In 2007, there were 144 Pawtucket children enrolled in Head Start. Ms. Bryant commented, "If proposed reductions in state funding for Head Start are approved, 400 children in Rhode Island – including 200 children attending Head Start in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls – will lose access to this important preschool program."

Pawtucket continues to have the lowest rate of access to full-day kindergarten among the core cities. Research shows that children in full-day kindergarten benefit academically and are more likely to be ready for first grade than children in half-day kindergarten. Full-day kindergarten programs can be especially beneficial to poor and minority children and can contribute significantly to closing academic achievement gaps. In the 2006-2007 school year, 26% of

kindergarten children in Pawtucket were enrolled in full-day programs, compared to 84% of children in the core cities, 52% statewide and 69% nationally.

Other education highlights during the 2006-2007 school year in Pawtucket include:

- The rate of fourth graders reading at or above proficiency level increased from 48% in 2005 to 55% in 2007, but continued to be lower than the state as a whole (64%).
- The rate of fourth graders who scored at or above proficiency in math increased from 42% in 2005 to 46% in 2007, but continued to be lower than the state as a whole (54%).
- 47% of eighth graders scored at or above proficiency in reading, and 36% scored at or above proficiency in math, compared to the statewide rates of 62% and 48% respectively.
- The high school attendance rate was 88%, lower than the statewide rate of 90%. Frequent absenteeism is linked with students dropping out and is a risk factor for delinquent behavior.
- 980 of Pawtucket's 8,667 students (11%) were receiving English language learner (ELL) services in the 2007-2008 school year, the 3rd highest percentage in the state.
- Sixteen percent of Pawtucket students were enrolled in special education services in the 2006-2007 school year, compared to 19% in the state as a whole.
- The Pawtucket high school graduation rate has improved from 67% in 2003 to 78% in 2007, yet is still below the state average of 89%. High school graduation is the minimum requisite for college and most employment. Adults without a high school diploma in Rhode Island are three and a half times as likely to be unemployed as those who receive a bachelor's degree.

"The *2008 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* shows both progress and areas that need improvement in the well-being of children and youth in Pawtucket. State investments in child care, Head Start, health care and education are critical components of any comprehensive strategy to improve outcomes for children and families. We must continue the progress that has been made in the health and education of Rhode Island children," stated Bryant.

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