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For Immediate Release

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

Despite harsh economic times, fewer families are eligible to receive cash assistance through the Rhode Island Works Program. The percentage of children in families enrolled in cash assistance has decreased by half since 2004 (from 26% in 2004 to 13% in 2008).

Providence shows significant gains in educational achievement, despite high child poverty rates.

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**Providence, RI, June 22, 2009** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Research Analyst, Elaine Budish, presented data from the *2009 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 Providence. 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 brought to the community in partnership with Meeting Street and was held on **Monday, June 22, 2009 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Meeting Street**, 1000 Eddy Street, Providence, RI.

Providence continues to have a high child poverty rate, with two in five children (41%) living in families with incomes below the poverty line. Almost half of these children live in extreme poverty – with income less than half the poverty line. “Over the past five years there has been a significant decrease in the availability of cash assistance for the poorest families in our state,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The high rate of unemployment in Rhode Island, along with stricter eligibility and shorter time limits for cash assistance may leave families without

employment or a cash assistance safety net, resulting in a rise in deep poverty, hardship and homelessness.”

Almost seven out of ten people who benefit from Rhode Island Works cash assistance are children under the age of 18, and nearly half (49%) of those children are under age six. In 2008, there were 6,101 Providence children in families receiving cash assistance through the Rhode Island Works Program. The percentage of Providence children in families enrolled in Rhode Island Works declined by half between 2004 and 2008 (from 26% in 2004 to 13% in 2008). This decline mirrors the statewide decreases in the Rhode Island Works caseload - which decreased by half (54%) between 1996 and 2008 (from 18,428 cases in 1996 to 8,424 cases in 2008). In just the past year, the caseload statewide decreased by 16%.

### **Education Outcomes Improve**

Educational achievement in math and reading improved significantly for Providence children between 2005 and 2008. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency levels in Providence increased from 31% to 47%. “While these rates continue to be lower than the state rate (68%), Providence is steadily making progress in educational achievement,” stated Elaine Budish, Research Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Similar gains are seen in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores as well as 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading scores.” Education highlights in Providence include:

- The rate of fourth graders who scored at or above proficiency in math increased from 25% in 2005 to 40% in 2008, but continued to be lower than the state as a whole (63%). Providence had the second lowest rate in the state in 2008.
- 8<sup>th</sup> graders at or above the proficiency level in math increased from 20% in 2004 to 28% in 2008, lower than the state rate of 53%.
- 8<sup>th</sup> graders at or above the proficiency level in reading increased from 25% in 2004 to 41% in 2008, lower than the state rate of 65%.
- One hundred percent of kindergarten children in Providence were enrolled in a full-day program in the 2008-2009 school year, compared with 58% statewide. 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.
- The Providence student mobility rate (28%) in the 2007-2008 school year was much higher than the state rate of 16%. Students who change schools in the middle of the year are more likely to be absent and are less likely to be academically successful than their peers.
- Sixty-three percent of Providence’s class of 2008 graduated on time in four years, lower than the state rate of 74%.

“While these trends are going in the right direction, they continue to lag behind the state as a whole. Effects from the recession are being felt across Rhode Island. Low-income children living in our state’s core cities are particularly vulnerable to the economic downturn. Access to high quality education from pre-K through college as well as investments in adult education are essential to move Providence families into well-paying jobs,” remarked Bryant.

### **Economic Well-Being**

According to the *2007 American Community Survey* conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, 41% of children in Providence live in poverty, more than twice the state rate of 17.5%. In 2008, the federal poverty threshold was \$17,346 for a family of three. Budish stated, “Children in poverty are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less as adults. Investments that enable parents to improve their economic situations through job training and adult educational programs can improve the life chances of our most vulnerable children.”

High-quality early education is critical to move children out of poverty and to provide 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 2008, there were 763 Providence children enrolled in Head Start, up from 600 children enrolled in 2007. However, fewer low-income children had access to child care due to changes in the child care subsidy system. The number of child care subsidies for Providence families decreased from 5,541 in 2004 to 3,179 in 2008.

### **Health**

Between 2005 and 2007, 93% of Rhode Island children under age 18 were insured. Investments in RIte Care, Rhode Island’s managed-care health insurance program, have helped to keep the rate of uninsured children low, despite declines in employer-sponsored health insurance coverage. Data from the *2009 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* reveal that while Providence has made progress in several areas of child health over the past decade, there is still more work to be done to ensure that Providence’s children grow up healthy.

- The Providence infant mortality rate is the second highest in the state. Between 2003 and 2007, the infant mortality rate in Providence was 8.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births compared to the Rhode Island rate of 6.3 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- Providence has the highest rate of women who receive delayed prenatal care. Almost one in five women (17.4%) received prenatal care after the first trimester.

- Between 1996-2000 and 2003-2007, the percentage of infants born low birthweight in Providence increased from 8.9% to 9.5%. The overall Rhode Island rate increased during the same period from 7.3% to 8.1%. Providence's rate for low birthweight is the second highest in the state.

### **Teen Pregnancy and Parenting**

While the teen birth rate for younger teen girls ages 15-17 has dropped significantly over the past decade, the current rate of 47.9 births per 1,000 to teen girls ages 15-17 in Providence continues to be more than double the state rate of 19.1 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17. "Teen pregnancy and parenting threatens the healthy development of teen parents as well as their children," stated Budish. "Poor school achievement, attendance and lack of engagement in school are predictors of teen pregnancy and child-bearing."

### **Safety**

Providence also has the highest rate of children with incarcerated parents in the state (26.2 per 1,000 children), and the Providence rate is more than double the state rate of 11.1 per 1,000 children. When a parent is in prison, their children are more likely to need assistance coping with parental absence and other social, emotional and educational supports necessary for child well-being.

Preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to helping children grow into strong, healthy productive adults and good parents. In 2008, there were 650 Providence children who were victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 14.4 victims per 1,000 children ages birth to 18. The child abuse and neglect rate for Providence was the lowest of the Rhode Island's six core cities, but higher than the state rate of 10.7 victims per 1,000 children. Budish noted, "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."

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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.