



Embargoed for Release

Until 3:00 a.m., July 25, 2007

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT welcomes 18th annual
National KIDS COUNT Data Book on the status of children in the
United States**

***Rhode Island ranks 20th among the states, improves on 4 measures of
child well-being and falls behind on 6.***

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PROVIDENCE, RI, July 25, 2007 – The eighteenth annual *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a state-by-state study of children's well-being issued by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, reveals that Rhode Island ranks 20<sup>th</sup> in the nation on an index of 10 key indicators (with 1<sup>st</sup> being the best and 50<sup>th</sup> being the worst). The report features data on 10 indicators of child well-being – including measures related to health, education and family economic security – and highlights information on the status of children in the U.S. as a whole as well as in each of the 50 states.

**U.S. Children in Foster Care**

The *2007 National KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides data and information on the more than 700,000 children who spend time in the foster care system each year. Nationally, 10 out of every 1,000 children under age 18 were in foster care at some point in 2004. Nearly half (49%) of these children are 11 years of age or older. Children need stability, permanency and safety in order to flourish.

When removal from the home is necessary for a child's safety and well-being, it is best for the child to be placed in a safe and stable placement. Frequent changes in out of home placements are disruptive and can compromise a child's developmental progress.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

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Temporary and congregate care (i.e., group homes, shelters, residential facilities, etc.) placements can create tremendous uncertainty and anxiety for children and do not provide the benefit of a strong, lasting family. Of all the children who entered foster care in the first six months of 2005, 41% had changed placements at least once within six months.

Permanency for children in state child welfare systems, in conjunction with safety, should be the paramount goal. Nationally in 2004, 22,718 children aged out of foster care never having gained a permanent family. Permanency for older youth in foster care is particularly difficult to secure. In 2005, nearly half of all teenagers who entered care (48%) were never placed with a family, but instead went directly to a congregate care setting.

This year's *National KIDS COUNT Data Book* essay provides recommendations for intensifying efforts to strengthen families and prevent the removal of children; making placement decisions that reduce trauma and facilitate permanence – with particular emphasis on those populations for whom permanence has been historically hard to achieve, older teens and African-American children; ensuring the equal right to strong families, regardless of race or ethnicity; improving decision-making in child welfare systems; supporting front-line practice; and reforming federal child welfare financing.

### **Rhode Island Children in Foster Care**

According to the *2007 Data Book*, in 2004 there were 3,332 children in foster care in Rhode Island at any time in the year. In Rhode Island, 14 out of every 1,000 children under the age of 18 were in foster care at some point in 2004. Of these children, 70% were above the age of 11. In 2004 in Rhode Island 82 youth aged out of foster care without connections to a permanent family. National and state permanency laws and policies are well-intentioned, but can often have the negative consequence of aging youth out of care, as preparation for adulthood often becomes the service plan goal. A service plan goal of independent living or other planned permanent living arrangements (long-term foster care) often does not have a concurrent goal of planning for permanent family relationships. Permanency should include the legal, physical and emotional safety and security of a family relationship and include connections with a variety of caring adults.

Rhode Island is one of a growing number of states who recognize the importance of continuing support and services to older youth in state care, up to the age of 21. Recent changes in Rhode Island legislation preserved this critical eligibility, while effectively changing the service delivery to 18 to 21 years olds in foster care. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island

KIDS COUNT, commented “It is important that we continue to provide critical health, education and housing services to youth aging out of foster care. It is also critical that we more effectively achieve permanency for children and youth in state care and ensure that every child has a strong, lifelong connection to caring adults.”

### **Rhode Island Indicators of Child Well-Being**

The *2007 National KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows that overall child well-being has continued to improve. Nationally, six out of ten child well-being indicators improved (infant mortality; child death rate; teen death rate; teen birth rate; teens who are high school dropouts; teens not attending school and not working) and four indicators worsened (low birth-weight infants; children living with parents without full-time year-round employment; children in poverty; and children living in single-parent families) since 2000.

In Rhode Island, four of 10 indicators improved since 2000 (infant mortality, child deaths for children ages 1-14, births to teens ages 15 to 19, and teens who are high school drop outs). Rhode Island experienced declines in 6 indicators (low birth-weight babies, teen death rate, teens not in school and not working, children living with parents without full-time year-round employment; children in poverty; and children living in single-parent families).

“Many of the critical indicators of child well-being tracked by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the annual data book are related to poverty. We must continue to focus on strategies that increase family economic security, including increasing high school graduation rates, decreasing teen birth rates, and providing critical work supports to families such as health care and child care. Most of the declines that we see in Rhode Island are closely tied to the impact of poverty on health and education,” noted Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve and ensure the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island children. The organization is one of fifty state-level organizations that work in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the social condition of children at the state and local level across the country.