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## For Immediate Release

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### **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents: *Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard***

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**Woonsocket, RI, October 23, 2007-** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst, Kat Keenan presented data from the *2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* to an audience of community and policy leaders. As part of the *Data in Your Backyard Series*, the presentation highlighted indicators of child well-being in Woonsocket and included a community discussion about the implications of the data. The presentation was held on **Wednesday, October 23, 2007 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at the Chaplin-Perez Center, 37 Center Street, Woonsocket, RI.**

### **Family and Community**

According to Census 2000, there were 11,155 children under the age of 18 residing in Woonsocket, a 5% increase from the 1990 decennial census. The 2000 Census data indicate that 31.8% of all children in Woonsocket under the age of 18 live below the federal poverty threshold (\$20,444 for a family of four). Of the 3,494 children living below the poverty threshold in Woonsocket, nearly two-thirds (2,061) lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below half of the federal poverty line (or \$8,121 for a family of three). Children in poverty are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less as adults.

According to new data from the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey, child poverty in Rhode Island decreased from 19.5% in 2005, to 15.1% in 2006. Rhode Island now ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in the country for child poverty, an improvement from last year when Rhode Island ranked 35<sup>th</sup>. "This significant drop in Rhode Island's child poverty rate is good news for Rhode Island families," stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

“We are seeing the results of our state’s investments in children.” The 2006 American Community Survey data, released by the U.S. Census Bureau in August 2007, indicate that the total number of Rhode Island children living in poverty decreased from 46,894 children under age 18 in 2005 to 35,456 children in 2006. Bryant noted, “We know that children living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold are at much higher risk for poor outcomes. Reducing child poverty rates directly influences a child’s chance for success.”

### ***Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect***

Woonsocket has the second highest rate in the state (21.4 indicated child abuse and neglect investigations per every 1,000 children, compared to 9.3 indicated investigations per 1,000 children statewide). For the past decade, Woonsocket has had the highest or second highest rate of indicated investigations of abuse and neglect in the state. In 2006, the rate of 21.4 is a significant increase from 2005 when Woonsocket reported 16.4 indicated investigations per 1,000 children. “Research shows that high-quality, intensive family support programs during the first few years of life can improve child outcomes and reduce the risk of neglect and abuse,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Local community efforts are being implemented in Woonsocket to improve parenting and provide support to families. One notable example in Woonsocket is the Family Support Network spearheaded by Family Resources Community Action and Connecting for Children and Families. This effort is a critical first step in reducing child abuse and neglect in the city and in ensuring the health, safety and well-being of the children and families of Woonsocket.”

### **Health**

The data from the 2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook reveal that Woonsocket shows slowed progress on some of the infant health indicators compared to Rhode Island as a whole.

- Between 2001 and 2005, Woonsocket had the highest rate of delayed prenatal care at a rate of 15.3%, compared to 9.4% for the state. Early prenatal care is important to identify and treat health problems and influence health behaviors that can compromise fetal development, infant health and maternal health.
- The infant mortality rate in Woonsocket between 2001 and 2005 was 8.8 per every 1,000 live births, compared to the state rate of 6.4 per 1,000 live births. This is double the rate of 4.4 between 1997-2001.
- Between 2001 and 2005, there were 399 Woonsocket infants born preterm, making up for 13% of infants born to Woonsocket mothers during that period. The overall Rhode Island rate was 12%. Preterm birth is a major determinant of infant mortality and illness and is the leading cause of death among newborns during the first month of life in the U.S.

Woonsocket's teen birth rate for minor teens (teens ages 15 to 17) was the third highest in the state at 41.3 births per every 1,000 girls ages 15-17, almost double the state rate of 19.5 births per every 1,000 girls ages 15-17. The Woonsocket teen birth rate for older teens (18 and 19) was the second highest in the state at 109.9 births per every 1,000 girls ages 18-19, more than double the state rate of 44 births per every 1,000 girls ages 18-19. Kat Keenan, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT noted, "The high rates of teen pregnancy in Woonsocket are a cause for concern. Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children. Teen pregnancy prevention is best addressed by using multiple approaches that meet the developmental needs of teens, provide opportunities to build career and leadership skills and offer accurate information about and increased access to reproductive health care services."

## **Education**

Data from the 2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook were presented on several indicators focused on programs that can lead to increased school readiness and school success, including full-day kindergarten and early care and education. Bryant remarked, "There is a critical need to ensure that access to these programs are maintained and that programs are of high quality. High quality early learning programs provide nurturing care and also provide learning opportunities that develop children's social, behavioral and cognitive skills."

Additional education highlights include:

- In Woonsocket, the percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students proficient in reading increased from 46% in October 2005 to 50% in October 2006. This compares to a statewide 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency level of 63% in 2006, up from 59% in October 2005.
- In 2006, 75% of Woonsocket students graduated from high school, up from 2005 when 70% of students graduated. The state rate of high school graduation rate is 85%. Young adults who drop out of high school are almost four times as likely to be unemployed as those with a bachelor's degree and are more likely to earn lower wages than those with a high school diploma.
- In 2006, five of Woonsocket's schools were classified as "making insufficient progress", including the high school. The other seven schools are classified as "moderately performing". This classification is based on 21 annual targets for each school. Actual school improvements may exceed those described by the classifications as schools may achieve or make significant gains in most, but not all, of the 21 targets.

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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.