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#RIFactbook

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases 28th Annual *Factbook* Focusing on the Status of Rhode Island's Children

Annual Factbook charts improvements and declines in the well-being of Rhode Island's 209,785 children. The Factbook allows us to assess how Rhode Island effectively supports children's development and where we need to focus increased attention

Providence, RI (May 16, 2022) –Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its twenty-eighth annual report on the well-being of Rhode Island's children and families on Monday, May 16, 2022 from 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. via Zoom. The **2022 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook** charts improvements and declines in the well-being of Rhode Island's 209,785 children. Data are presented for the state and for 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. There are a total of 70 indicators of child well-being in the *2022 Factbook*.

"Healthy, well-educated children and strong families are the foundation of Rhode Island's economic prosperity," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Too many Rhode Island families were struggling to survive economically before the pandemic. Now that we are turning the curve on the pandemic, we need to ensure that long-term supports are in place that will yield the best outcomes for Rhode Island's children and families, particularly the most vulnerable who were hardest hit by the pandemic and the resulting economic impact.

"We are seeing a major increase in children and youth with mental health conditions whose families are having trouble accessing services due to a workforce crisis in community based programs. It is cost effective to invest in a seamless system of high quality children's behavioral health care rather than pay the much higher cost of crisis intervention. "

"The data and policy analysis from the *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* provides the base of information we need to advocate for policies and investments that will improve child outcomes. We need to make important, cost effective investments in child care, Early Intervention/First Connections, RI Works, affordable housing, children's behavioral health, mental health professionals in schools, support for Multilingual learners, out-of-school-time programs, health insurance coverage for all children, including undocumented children, and supports and services for foster youth, including those who are aging out of DCYF care. Working together we can ensure that children and families reach their full potential and lead the way for Rhode Island's future success."

Bryant concluded, "The *Factbook* allows us to take stock of how Rhode Island effectively supports our children's development and where we need to focus increased attention and efforts. This year we have new data showing the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of our state and particularly our children. Unacceptable gaps continue to exist between Children of Color and white children in nearly every *Factbook* indicator. These gaps have persisted because of systemic racism and barriers to opportunity that must be addressed and dismantled to ensure that every child can succeed. We call on lawmakers to prioritize equitable solutions to ensure that children and families can move forward with the health, educational, and economic supports they need to thrive," she said.

A Virtual Gathering for The *Factbook* Release

Over 300 people are registered to attend the *Factbook* release event, including Governor Dan McKee, Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Congressman James Langevin, Congressman David Cicilline, Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi, Senator Sandra Cano representing the Senate President, General Assembly members, policymakers, and community leaders from education, health, and human services. The event will take place via Zoom.

KEYNOTE REMARKS

Miriam Calderón, Chief Policy Officer at ZERO TO THREE, will give keynote remarks. Ms. Calderon has been a champion for babies throughout her career, with a focus on centering racial equity and engaging parents and practitioners in developing responsive policy solutions. She previously served as a presidential appointee in the Biden Administration in the role of deputy assistant secretary for early learning at the U.S. Department of Education. She also served as an advisor to the Domestic Policy Council and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services during the Obama administration and the Early Learning System Director for the State of Oregon.

Ashanti Gonzalez – a Rhode Island high school student at Juanita Sanchez High and Young Voices Board Member – will provide **Youth Keynote Remarks**. She has been active in many public policy efforts.

PRESENTATION OF THE RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT FACTBOOK

The *2022 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* will be presented to Governor McKee, Senator Reed, Senator Whitehouse, Congressman Cicilline, Congressman Langevin, Speaker Shekarchi, and Senator Cano.

Every year at the release event, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also presents the *Factbook* to a community leader who is working to make things better for children and families. This year, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will recognize and present a *Factbook* to **Chanda Womack, Founding Executive Director of the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)**, and thank her for her leadership. The intersection of her identity as a Cambodian Refugee woman and mom of two bi-racial (Black and Cambodian) children have shaped her ideologies, advocacy and organizing. These identity markers fuel how she shows up, occupies and shares space not just for education justice but for all issues that impact historically excluded and invisibilized communities. Her leadership and movement building has garnered local and national recognition for ARISE and Rhode Island.

While Racial and Ethnic Diversity Has Increased, Persistent, Unacceptable Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Child Outcomes Remain

In Rhode Island, children are more likely to be identified as People of Color than adults. In 2020 in Rhode Island, 47% of children under age 18 were People of Color, compared with 28% of adults.. According to the 2020 Census, in Rhode Island less than 1% of children under 18 were American Indian or Native Alaskan, 3% were Asian, 6% were Black or African American, 27% were Hispanic or Latino, less than 1% were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 1% were Some other race, 8% were Two or more races, and 53% were white.

Throughout the *Factbook*, data on racial and ethnic disparities are presented in as many indicators as possible and summarized in the Racial and Ethnic Disparities indicator. Collecting and reporting on data disaggregated by race and ethnicity is an important first step to identifying ways to eliminate them. Data on disparities -- and information about the systemic racism that has resulted in barriers to opportunity -- can help identify policies to dismantle racism and eliminate disparities.

- Black, Latino, and Native American children are more likely than Asian and white children to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and face challenges above and beyond the burdens of individual poverty.

- In Rhode Island, almost one-third (31%) of Hispanic children live in concentrated poverty, higher than in any other state.
- In 2020, more than half (59%) of Rhode Island's Children of Color lived in one of the four core cities (those cities with the highest percentages of children living in poverty), and more than three quarters of the children in Central Falls (90%) and Providence (85%) were Children of Color.
- The Asian American community is diverse, the fastest-growing, and the most economically divided racial and ethnic group in the U.S.
 - Cambodians make up the largest Southeast Asian population in Rhode Island and have higher poverty rates, lower median household incomes, and lower postsecondary attainment rates than other Asian groups.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Rhode Island Children

COVID-19 took a serious toll on child and family well-being in very concrete, tangible ways. Many families have weathered unemployment and associated financial stress, food and housing insecurity; and the continuing need for stable, affordable child care as parents balance work and caring for children. Significantly more children and youth are experiencing mental health challenges. Low-income families and Families of Color in marginalized communities were hit hardest both by the disease itself and the resulting economic impact, which exacerbated longstanding racial and ethnic disparities.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has been focused on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have on Rhode Island children and families, particularly our most vulnerable children and families:

- While rental hardship has fallen from the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when one in five renters reported they were behind in rent, many households are still struggling. Black renters and families with children continue to face the greatest **housing insecurity**.
- The COVID-19 pandemic limited children's access to nutritious food and physical activity. Early data shows that the rate of **BMI increase** for children ages two to 19 nearly doubled during the pandemic.
- While mental health challenges for youth existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a **significant increase in anxiety and depression among youth** since 2020.
- The expanded **Child Tax Credit** kept many families and children out of poverty, but it **has ended**.
- School closures and the combination of distance learning and hybrid models have resulted in **significant learning loss**, especially among low-income students, Multilingual Learners, students receiving special education services and Students of Color.
- **College enrollment declined** during the pandemic.

The **workforce crisis** affects access to many **vital services for children** and is in large part due to inadequate reimbursements/wages, including for **child care and Early Intervention**. If we are going to address the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on children and families, we need to make important, cost-effective investments in child care, early learning, Multilingual Learners, out-of-school time programs, health care, behavioral health and more, and we need to ensure that we have the people resources in place to meet children and families' needs.

Please see the accompanying Executive Summary for more detailed information on trends observed in the *Factbook* indicators.

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