



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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For Immediate Release

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Today the U.S. Census Bureau released the latest data on childhood poverty in Rhode Island and each of the 50 states. Rhode Island was ranked 5th in New England and 19th nationally (where 1st is best).

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data released today, 1 in 6 children -- 16.9% of Rhode Island children under age 18 -- lived in poverty in the previous 12 months.

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**Providence, RI, September 28, 2010** – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released new data from the U.S. Census Bureau's *2009 American Community Survey* (ACS) showing the extent of child poverty in Rhode Island, New England and each of the 50 states. The new Census data show that the child poverty rate in Rhode Island was 16.9% in 2009 and that 37,731 children in Rhode Island were living in poverty. While this is an apparent increase from 15.5% (34,816 children) in 2008, the difference is not statistically significant. Nationally, the child poverty rate increased from 18.2% in 2008 to 20.0% in 2009.

Rhode Island ranked 5th of the 6 New England states and 19th in the country for child poverty (where 1st is best), as compared to last year when Rhode Island ranked 22nd nationally. The poverty data for 2009 are based on the federal poverty threshold of \$17,285 a year for a family of three with two children and \$21,756 for a family of four with two children.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, stated, "About one in six children in our state live in families that do not have enough resources to meet basic needs. We need to ensure that families get the help they need during these difficult economic times."

Federal and state investments, such as unemployment benefit extensions and tax credits, including the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit,

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which were expanded as part of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) have been important supports for families that hover near the poverty line, especially during this time of record high unemployment.

“During these hard times, it is important to connect families with critical programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, and housing assistance that can help them meet their basic needs. These types of programs can help ameliorate the worst effects of poverty while families are trying to find jobs,” said Bryant.

Bryant, noted, “The application process for health insurance, food assistance, and child care subsidies is more complicated and costly than it needs to be but progress is being made to align and improve the application process. Rhode Island is now working on a modernization/benefit access project designed to streamline access to important programs for eligible children and families.”

### **Children Living In Extreme Poverty**

According to Census data released today, of all Rhode Island children living in poverty in 2009, almost one-half (47.5% or 17,904 children) were living in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is defined as one-half of the federal poverty level or \$8,643 a year for a family of three with two children and \$10,878 for a family of four with two children in 2009. “The circumstances facing children and families in extreme poverty require careful monitoring, because children in these families are vulnerable to deep poverty, hardship and homelessness. We are already seeing historic highs in the number of children and families experiencing homelessness,” remarked Bryant.

“We are concerned that the high unemployment rate in Rhode Island and the new shorter time limits for cash assistance under RI Works are leaving families without either employment or a cash assistance safety net,” said Bryant. In 2009, in response to the economic downturn, the Rhode Island General Assembly delayed for one year the imposition of the new 24-month time limit for some families receiving cash assistance. However, this new time limit went into effect this past summer and almost 1,000 individuals, many of whom were children, lost their cash assistance on July 1, 2010.

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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.