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EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE until 12:01 a.m. EST January 22, 2015

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases New Report *Child Poverty in Rhode Island*

The negative effects of poverty on children are both immediate and long-lasting

Poverty is an issue affecting children and families in every city and town in Rhode Island

Statewide and community-specific child poverty rates are presented in the Issue Brief

Providence, RI (January 22, 2015) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its newest *Issue Brief – Child Poverty in Rhode Island* – at a policy roundtable attended by policy makers, state agency leaders, and community members. The event was held today from 9:00–10:30 a.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, provided welcoming remarks, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller presented highlights from the *Issue Brief*. Linda Katz, Co-Founder and Policy Director of The Economic Progress Institute, Joanne McGunagle, Executive Director of Comprehensive Community Action Program, and Dr. Susan Lusi, Superintendent of Providence Public Schools, provided perspectives.

The negative effects of poverty are both immediate and long-lasting. Living in poverty affects children during their childhood, and well beyond into adolescence and adulthood. Poverty is linked to chronic – or toxic – stress, which negatively impacts the early brain development that serves as the basis for learning, behavior and health later in life. Children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods, are more likely to have physical and behavioral health problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, earn less or be unemployed as an adult, and fall below the poverty line at least once later in their lives.

“Because living in poverty negatively impacts children now, and far into their future, it’s critical that we have both short-term and long-term strategies for children and families to succeed,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “In the short term, we need to support crucial programs and services that reduce the negative effects of poverty on our children and families. For example, nutrition assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, and school meals help ensure that children in poverty get the healthy food they need to learn and grow. To improve long-term outcomes, we must ensure access to high-quality education and the educational achievement of current students in Rhode Island, while also improving the education levels and job skills of their parents.”

Defining Poverty

In 2013, 21.5% (44,923) of Rhode Island's 208,700 children under the age of 18 lived below the federal poverty threshold. During the recession, we saw increases in child poverty in Rhode Island and across the nation, and child poverty rates have not returned to pre-recession levels. The poverty data are based on the federal poverty threshold, which was an income of \$18,769 for a family of three with two children, and \$23,624 for a family of four with two children in 2013.

Families with incomes below 50% of the federal poverty threshold are considered to be living in extreme poverty. In 2013, the extreme poverty level was \$9,385 for a family of three with two children and \$11,812 for a family of four with two children. In 2013, an estimated 9% (19,262) of all children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty.

Child Poverty in Rhode Island – A Data Snapshot:

- At 21.5%, Rhode Island had the highest child poverty rate in New England in 2013.
- Poverty rates are highest in the four core cities of Central Falls (41.1%), Pawtucket (28.9%), Providence (39.7%), and Woonsocket (42.8%).
- Between 2011 and 2013, more than one-third (38%) of Rhode Island's poor children were ages five and younger, and the state's youngest children were most likely to live in poverty.
- Of all children living in poverty in Rhode Island between 2011 and 2013, 53% were White, 16% were Black, 3% were Asian, 1% were Native American, 20% were Some other race, and 7% were Two or more races.
 - Using Census definitions, Hispanic children may be included in any race category. Between 2011 and 2013, 47% (21,073) of Rhode Island's poor children were Hispanic.
 - While more than half of all poor children in Rhode Island are White, minority children are much more likely to be living in poverty.

Recommendations

The *Issue Brief* offers recommendations in the areas of work supports, income and financial asset building; health coverage; housing; teen pregnancy prevention and support for teen parents; child care and early education; K-12 education; and adult education and jobs.

The full list of the *Recommendations* can be found on pages 10-11 of the *Issue Brief*.

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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.