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Maine Ranks Well in National Report on Child Well-being

Areas of Concern Include Infant Health and Children in Poverty

AUGUSTA, Me. (August 17, 2011)— According to data released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in its 2011 national KIDS COUNT Data Book, Maine is doing relatively well on several measures of child well-being, ranking 11th overall among the 50 states. However, Maine's rate of infant deaths and low birthweight babies has risen, and the percent of children living in poverty has increased.

"Children are feeling the effects of the recession all across the country," says Dean Crocker, president of Maine Children's Alliance (MCA). "Maine's numbers on child well-being look better than other states in certain categories due to some of our successful statewide efforts to support children, but we still have cause for concern. The report shows that Maine's youngest citizens need more attention and more support."

Each year, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) produces the national KIDS COUNT Data Book—the leading report on the status and well-being of children in all 50 states. MCA is part of the national KIDS COUNT network, a state-by-state effort funded by AECF to track the status of children across the United States. In March, MCA released 2011 Maine KIDS COUNT, which includes data at both the state and county level.

This year's national KIDS COUNT focuses on how states have fared since the recession. The report's data shows that the economic and social gains for children that occurred during the 1990s stalled even before the economic downturn began.

Some of the trends seen within the 10 indicators reported in KIDS COUNT show cause for concern in Maine.

In 2000, Maine's infant mortality rate was 4.9 deaths per 1,000 live births. By 2007, infant mortality rose to 6.3 deaths per 1,000 births. Maine had the biggest increase of all states in infant mortality. In contrast, the national infant mortality rate during that period dropped by 1 percent.

In a related category, the percentage of low birthweight (less than 2,500 grams) babies born in Maine increased from 6.0 percent in 2000 to 6.7 percent in 2008—a 12 percent increase. Nationally, there was also a rise in low birthweight babies (7.6 to 8.2 percent) during this period.

VOICES FOR MAINE'S CHILDREN

“Our babies are our future,” says Crocker. “These numbers are moving in the wrong direction. When we see disturbing trends in the data, we must respond with investments in programs and policies that give children a better start in life. ”

Also on the bad news front: The percentage of children in Maine living in poverty rose from 12 percent to 17 percent between 2000 and 2009.

“When the rate of kids living in poverty increases by 42 percent, that’s a significant problem,” says Crocker. “For children, living in poverty is inextricably linked to their health and their educational achievement. It’s the starting point to a child’s progress toward adulthood, which means it ultimately shapes our state’s future.”

This year’s national Data Book reports an 18 percent increase in the U.S. child poverty rate between 2000 and 2009. This increase means that 2.5 million more American children are living below the federal poverty line (\$21,756 for a family of two adults and two children), effectively wiping out the gains made on this important measure in the late 1990s.

Maine also had one of the biggest increases in children living in single parent families, rising from 24 percent to 33 percent between 2000 and 2009.

The national KIDS COUNT report analyzes several other indicators, and Maine fared relatively well in some. For example, Maine’s child death rate dropped from 21 deaths per 100,000 to 16 deaths per 100,000 between 2000 and 2007. The teen death rate also dropped in Maine during this period, from 63 deaths down to 54 deaths per 100,000. Likely reasons for these drops include better seatbelt use, as well as a decrease in the percent of uninsured children in Maine.

Maine’s teen birth rate has decreased by 10 percent, dropping from 29 to 16 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19 between 2000 and 2008. Also, Maine teens who were not in high school and were not high school graduates decreased between 2000 and 2009, from 5 percent to 4 percent. Our national ranking for this category is 3rd place.

The 22nd annual KIDS COUNT Data Book can be found at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. Maine KIDS COUNT is available at www.mekids.org.

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