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Contact: Derrick Crowe 512-320-0222, ext 112 or crowe@cphp.org

NATIONAL 2009 *KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK* SHOWS ECONOMIC SECURITY, INFANT HEALTH MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR TEXAS CHILDREN

Austin, Texas--Texas ranks in the bottom third of states (34th of 50) on child well-being in a study released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The national 2009 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* reveals that compared to 2000, in 2007 more Texas children lived in economically insecure families and key indicators of infant health worsened. These data are particularly troubling because, while they represent most updated information available, they were gathered prior to the current economic recession—meaning these indicators of child well-being will likely continue to worsen as the data catches up with our recent harsh economic realities.

“Our state should prioritize the well-being of our children. Unfortunately, the data shows that even during strong economic times, children fell through the cracks. The question remains: will Texas continue to be one of the worst states for child outcomes, or will we make the necessary investments in public structures that encourage child health and economic security? As a Texan, I’ve never liked the idea of being the worst in anything. That’s not who we want to be,” Texas KIDS COUNT Director Dr. Frances Deviney said.

Texas’ low national ranking is driven primarily by our high teen birth rate (63 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19) and 23-percent child poverty rate, high school dropout rate (8 percent of all 16-19 year olds), and children whose parents do not have full-time employment rate (33 percent; 26th of 50) near the national average.

Key Indicators of Child Well-Being in Texas

Economic Security for Texas Children Got Worse *Prior* to the Recession

The economic expansion in 2007 left Texas children behind. That year, the number of Texas children living in poverty increased to 1.5 million, or nearly one of every four children in the state. One of three Texas children (2.2 million) had parents that lacked secure employment in 2007, an increase of 3 percent since 2000. Because these negative changes occurred during the economic expansion prior to the recession, they suggest Texas state policies make it harder, not easier, for Texas families with children to escape poverty.

Key Infant Health Indicators Declined

Both the percentage of Texas infants born with low birth weight (under 5.5 pounds) and the infant mortality rate rose in 2007. Low birth weight rates rose 14 percent from 7.4 percent of all births in 2000 to 8.4 percent in 2006, totaling nearly 34,000 Texas infants. The infant mortality rate rose 9 percent during the same period, totaling nearly 2,500 infant deaths (or 6.2 deaths per 1,000 live births) in 2007.

A Bright Spot: Texas Child and Teen Death Rates Improved

The child death rate in Texas decreased 13 percent since 2000 to 21 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-to-14 in 2006. The state's teen death rate decreased 16 percent during that same period, falling to 64 deaths per 100,000 teens in 2006. The decline in both rates are driven largely by a reduction in accidents.

National Book Available Online

The data described above shows the clear importance of tracking indicators of child well-being. The 20th annual *Data Book* contains the Annie E. Casey Foundation's essay that takes stock of the country's progress in keeping track of this type of data. The book is available online at: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook/2009/Default.aspx>.

More Texas Data

The book is also complemented by an expanded online Data Center that contains hundreds of measures of child well-being covering national, state, county, and city information.

- To access Texas' profile, go to:
<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/stateprofile.aspx?state=TX&group=DataBook&loc=45&dt=1%2c3%2c2%2c4>
- To compare Texas to other states by indicator: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Default.aspx>

Online Audio Sound Bites

Audio sound bites are also available online:

- Dr. Frances Deviney, Texas KIDS COUNT Director: <http://www.radionewssource.com/MP3/kidscounttx.mp3>
- Laura Beavers, Coordinator of the National KIDS COUNT Project at the Annie E. Casey Foundation: <http://www.radionewssource.com/MP3/kidscountnationalbeavers.mp3>.
- Patrick McCarthy, Senior Vice President at the Annie E. Casey Foundation: <http://www.radionewssource.com/MP3/kidscountnationalmccarthy.mp3>.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) policy institute committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. CPPP is home to the Texas KIDS COUNT project. You can learn more about CPPP at <http://www.cppp.org>.

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