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THE STATE OF TEXAS CHILDREN 2009-10

Research Offers a Bleak Forecast of Recession-era Child Poverty in Texas

Austin, Texas— On February 12, the Center for Public Policy Priorities will release *The State of Texas Children: Texas KIDS COUNT Annual Data Book 2009-2010*, a resource that offers an updated look at the well-being of children in Texas, as well as complete online data snapshots for every county in Texas. This year's data book chronicles how **decades of state fiscal belt-tightening have squeezed off investment in child well-being in Texas**, noting that even though federal stimulus dollars filled the gaps in the 2010-2011 state budget, resulting in a slight increase in state spending on services to children, Texas still ranks among the 10 states with the highest rate of child poverty in the nation, as it has for every year since 2000. Furthermore, the most current data available does not yet reflect the effects of the economic recession which hit Texas children and families much later than the rest of the country.

Unemployment and child poverty in Texas

Even though child poverty data from 2009 is not yet compiled, the rising level of unemployment—from 6.4 percent in January 2009 to 8.2 percent in September 2009—suggests that child poverty—23 percent (Nearly 1.5 million kids) in 2008—rose as well. **High unemployment is a consistent indicator of high child poverty rates, and during past recessions, child poverty rates continued to increase for a year or more after the rest of the economy made an initial recovery.** Children who live in poverty face a higher risk of cognitive, emotional, educational, and health problems compared to children living in high-income families.

Rate of Uninsured Children on the Rise for Most Income Levels

For the 10th consecutive year, Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation, with 20 percent of Texas children uninsured —nearly twice the national average. Increases in the rate of uninsured children were not limited to low-income families in 2008, with the children of moderate- and high-income families seeing the largest uninsured increase in several years. The percentage of children who were covered through a parent's employer fell from 50 percent in 2003 to 46 percent in 2008. Because of scant insurance regulation in Texas, **a huge and growing gap exists between those who can afford insurance and are not denied because of pre-existing conditions and those who are covered through an employer's plan, leaving a large and growing percentage of Texas families who have incomes that are too high to qualify them for public health benefits, but who still cannot qualify for or afford coverage under private plans.** Even for families that do qualify for public health benefits—half of Texas' 1.4 million uninsured children do—lack of education about available programs, intimidating enrollment procedures, and a broken eligibility and enrollment system that has improperly denied benefits to hundreds of thousands of Texans, keep them from using the benefits that they qualify for.

Nutrition, Poverty, and Childhood Obesity

Texas faces the second-highest rate of child food insecurity in the nation, with 16.3 percent (1.4 million) Texas households unsure where their next meal will come from, or how they will afford it in 2006-2008. That number has been steadily increasing over the past decade. Forty percent of Texas' low-income children are considered obese, because families that lack the resources to buy healthy foods instead buy high-energy, low-cost foods with added fats and sugars.

Additional State and County-level Data Include:

- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Death and Violence
- Maternal and Infant Health
- Early Care and Education

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The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) is a non-profit, non-partisan policy institute dedicated to improving the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. You can learn more about CPPP at <http://www.cppp.org>.