



Rankings on Alabama's Child Well-Being Show Challenge for Policy Makers

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3:00 a.m. EDT July 25, 2007

**Contact: Kristin Bailey/ VOICES for Alabama's Children
334.213.2410 x.101 or 334.444.7957 (cell)**

Montgomery-- The *2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book* released today shows the need for policy makers and other Alabamians to focus on support of essential policy and programs that impact the lives of children and families. Since 2000, Alabama improved in four and grew worse in six measures of child-well being in the *Data Book*. The publication, which is released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in partnership with VOICES for Alabama's Children, showed a decrease in overall national ranking from 43rd to 48th.

"We actually see this as a wake-up call to those people in Alabama who can positively impact children's lives," said Linda Tilly, Executive Director of VOICES for Alabama's Children. "Because of efforts by child advocates across the state, there is a better understanding of how the well-being of children ultimately affects our state's overall economy and quality of life. Now we must fund, support and invest in these resources to positively affect child well-being in our state."

Leading the areas of improvement were those relating to teens. Alabama's teen birth rate (births to females ages 15-19) declined 15% between 2000 and 2004. This is good news for Alabama, because teen pregnancy is closely linked to a many health and social risks for both baby and mother. Other areas of significant improvements for teens were indicators related to education.

According to the *Data Book*, the percent of teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19) improved by 31% from 2000 to 2005. The percent of teens not attending school and not working also showed a significant improvement in the same period of time. Programs that have been initiated in Alabama such as high-quality pre-kindergarten, the Alabama Reading Initiative, the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative and ACCESS Distance Learning, have and will continue to improve Alabama's education system.

The areas that grew worse were: percent of low-birthweight babies, child death rate, teen death rate, percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, percent of children in poverty and percent of children in single-parent families. The percentage of low-birthweight babies increased by 7% from 2000 to 2004. Babies born at low birth weight enter the world at risk for lifelong physical, cognitive and behavioral disabilities. The costs to the state and to the community are significant.

A high percentage of children in poverty is a commonality of many southern states. This

(more)

indicator, which is defined as an income below \$19,806 for a family of two adults and two children in 2005, showed an increase of 19% in Alabama since 2000. Research has shown a strong correlation between poverty and negative impacts on child well-being.

In the *Data Book*, West Virginia and New Mexico are the only two states nationally ranked in the bottom 10 that are not typically considered “southern states”. Yet, both states have high rates of poverty. Due to Alabama’s industrial growth, there will likely be more availability of better paying jobs in the future. This could affect Alabama’s poverty rate, which would in turn impact child well-being in our state, but we must invest in community and state-level programs and supports to ensure that our children get off to a good start, succeed in school and are prepared to enter this 21st century workforce in the state.

“We see the data, we see the ranking and we have a choice to make,” said Tilly. “Many citizens, advocates, and policy makers have worked hard to bring Alabama to a new position of national prominence in terms of economic development. But, we must stop and ask ourselves, where it will be tomorrow. We have the advantages of incoming industry and a flourishing economy that many of our neighboring states do not have. We must make a choice to invest in our children today, because they will be the ones who will fuel our economy tomorrow.”

###