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National Report on Children's Well-Being Released

Arkansas Ranks 45th in Nation

Little Rock – A report released today provides valuable insight into the well-being of children at both the state and national level. It provides detailed information for children in several areas including economics, education and health. While the report shows that Arkansas has made progress in areas such as education, it more importantly highlights areas that need attention such as health and poverty.

Released annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the 2007 Kids Count Databook is intended to assess the well-being of America's children. The report ranks all 50 states based on their performance in ten areas. Based on several indicators, Arkansas's overall rank (45) remains unchanged from 2006.

“The report shows that while Arkansas did show improvement in some areas, we made no progress in others,” said Rich Huddleston, Executive Director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF). “If we want to fair better nationally, we must enact some significant policy changes.”

The most noticeable improvement for the state was in the area of education. The data, which is based on 2005 information, shows that the percentage of teens dropping out of high school improved from 12% in 2000 to 8% in 2005. Additionally, the percentage of teens not attending school nor working dropped from 12% in 2000 to 9% in 2005.

“This data covers the period of time in which education reforms stemming from the Lake View case would've begun to take effect,” said Huddleston. “This suggests we are headed in the right

direction. However, we've got to make sure that those reforms continue. We can't relax our commitment because the Supreme Court is no longer looking over our shoulder."

The more troubling findings within the report show that Arkansas has had setbacks in health indicators. For example, both the child death rate and teen death rate showed little or no improvement, and the percentage of low-birth weight babies fell behind the national average. These indicators point to the need for public education and policy that protect the health of our state's children.

"There are several policies that Arkansas has continued to reject such as primary seat belt laws, graduated driver's licenses and trauma centers that would have a direct effect on the health of our state's children," said Rhonda Sanders, Health Policy Director for AACF. "Educating the public on health matters would also go a long way toward improving the situation."

The state also did not improve in the area of poverty, the affects of which can permeate all other indicators. The percentage of Arkansas children living in poverty was unchanged from 2000 to 2005. While it is certainly better than an increase, the fact that the situation has not improved is troubling.

According to Huddleston, "The effects of poverty reach into all facets of a family's lives. It affects children's health, nutrition, school readiness and achievement as well as future employment success. If we're going to make progress for Arkansas's children, we've got to address child poverty and the economic well-being of families."

"During the recent legislative session, the state made significant steps in numerous areas impacting children, such as quality pre-k for at-risk kids, K-12 education, low-income tax relief, children's mental healthcare and workforce development for low-income families. But if lasting progress is going to be made, a comprehensive policy agenda must be created that focuses on children and families," said Huddleston.

More information on the 2007 Kids Count Databook can be found at www.aecf.org or www.aradvocates.org.

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