



**STATE OF TENNESSEE
TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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Tennessee Improves in Child Well-Being Ranking

Tennessee moved up three places in the cumulative rankings from last year in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual KIDS COUNT National Data Book on child well-being released today. The data book also focuses on what the states and nation can do to help the child welfare system assure vulnerable children obtain and retain permanent homes.

Children who are in state custody because of parental neglect or abuse or other inability to care for them need more than just safety, according to the report. They need a supportive family, whether it is a birth family receiving the supports needed to care for the children; a relative who can give protection and love, as well as a connection to family; or an adoptive family willing to make a lifetime commitment to the children.

Tennessee has been working to help the children in state custody find permanent homes. As reported in the data book, Tennessee had a slightly lower

rate of its children spend time in state custody in 2004 than did the nation on average.

“The Tennessee Department of Children’s Services has made a commitment to providing each child with a permanent connection to a caring adult who loves the child unconditionally – what every child needs for successful transition to adulthood – and has focused on ensuring more children have permanent families,” said Linda O’Neal, executive director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth. The Commission is the KIDS COUNT affiliate in Tennessee.

In 2005, Tennessee was recognized as the second best state in the nation in adoption improvements, she said. The Department and its partners, including the Commission, sponsored a meeting focused on youth permanency in Nashville in April, and will schedule similar events in East and West Tennessee later this year.

The Department has reduced the number of children in state custody. Lengths of stay in state custody reached a six-year low, and measures of success in achieving permanent solutions and helping families solve their problems have improved. (Details about these measures follow.)

“Improvements in caseworker staffing and compensation, investments in training and more legal options, including subsidized guardianship for children when adoption is not feasible, are paying off in ways that help prevent family

disruption, improve stability and provide permanency for more children,”

O’Neal said.

Tennessee’s ranking of 43rd in overall child well-being included significant improvements in school dropout, child death rate and teen birth rate. Tennessee’s improvements in child death rate and infant mortality were greater than improvements nationally. The majority of indicators either improved or stayed the same when compared to 2000.

However, despite its efforts, Tennessee ranked in the bottom 10 in five of the 10 primary indicators.

“We know good public policies can go a long way toward improving outcomes for children,” O’Neal said. “But it takes more than good policies. Repeatedly, when only policy decisions are rated, Tennessee ranks above average. Unfortunately, as long as we fund services for children and families near the bottom nationally, those working hard to help our children survive and thrive have challenges translating good policy into good outcomes.”

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is an independent agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly. Its primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families.

The KIDS COUNT National Data Book is available on the Internet at www.kidscount.org and through TCCY’s website at www.tennessee.gov/tccy.

The KIDS COUNT program is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to disadvantaged children. For more information, contact (615) 741-2633 or a TCCY regional coordinator.

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Successes in Permanence

- 16 percent reduction in children in state custody from January, 2004 (10,166) to March, 2007 (8,496);
- Average length of stay in state custody down 18 percent to a six-year low;
- 4 percent improvement in timeliness of reunification;
- 30 percent improvement in timeliness of adoptions;
- 14 percent improvement in finalized adoptions;
- Reduction in adoption disruptions: less than 2 percent of adoptions disrupt in Tennessee when they receive special Adoption Support and Preservation services through a consortium of providers, compared to an average of 25 percent of all adoptions disrupting nationally.