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***Twenty-Fifth Edition of KIDS COUNT Data Book Press Highlights
Improvements in Health and Education, but More Children are
Living in High-Poverty Neighborhoods and in Single-Parent
Families***

Richmond – Demographic, social and economic changes combined with major policy developments have affected the lives of children in both positive and negative ways since 1990 in Virginia and the nation, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 25th edition of its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. Virginia's overall child well-being national rank moved from 11th in 2013 to 9th in 2014. The additional good news nationally and in Virginia is the steady improvement in the numbers of children attending preschool as a result of federal and state policies such as Headstart and Virginia's Preschool Initiative, and an increase in the number of school children proficient in reading and math. The bad news nationally and in Virginia is too many children living in poverty, an increasing percentage of children living in single-parent families, and in spite of the improvements, the majority of fourth graders still scored below proficient in reading and math.

There were additional positive trends in Virginia between 1990 and 2012. Parental educational gains have been made that benefit kids: a smaller percentage of children live in families in which the household head lacks a high school diploma. This has improved from 21 percent to only 9 percent. In addition, the teen birth rate declined to a historic low – from 53 to 23 per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. The death rate for children and teens has fallen as a result of medical advances and policy changes that resulted in the increased usage of seat belts, car seats and bike helmets – from 44 to 22 per 100,000.

Unfortunately, Virginia has some worrisome trends as well. The child poverty rate as defined by the federal government increased from 13

percent to 15 percent. In 2012, 279,000 of Virginia's children were living in poverty. The percentage of children living in single-parent families has risen significantly – in 1990 this stood at 23 percent and by 2012 the figure had risen to 31 percent. The percentage of children scoring below proficient on their reading level has declined from 69 percent to 57 percent, but this percentage is still alarming.

“Since 1990 we have learned a great deal from research about how children’s brains develop and what threatens their healthy development,” said Ted Groves, the KIDS COUNT Director at Voices for Virginia’s Children. “For example, we know that parents should read to their children everyday starting in infancy to prepare their young minds to learn language and early literacy skills. We also know that every child can benefit from preschool, but especially children from low-income families.” Groves added, “We know also that chronic adverse childhood experiences, such as growing up in poverty, create harmful toxic stress that prevents healthy brain development. So, we know a great deal about how to help all of our children develop into healthy adults. We need all sectors to work collaboratively to develop and advance solutions that help all children succeed”

The [*KIDS COUNT Data Book*](#) features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available in the [*KIDS COUNT Data Center*](#), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being. Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and view real-time information on mobile devices. Virginia data in the KIDS COUNT Data Center can also be found at <http://bit.ly/vakidscount>. Virginia’s KIDS COUNT webpage can be found at Voices for Virginia’s Children, <http://bit.ly/vakidscountdata>.

About Voices for Virginia’s Children

Voices for Virginia’s Children is a statewide independent, nonpartisan policy research and advocacy organization that champions public policies to improve the lives of Virginia’s children. Voices is home to the Virginia KIDS COUNT Data Center.

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