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West Virginia Ranks 37th in the Nation in Overall Child Well-Being For the Second Year in a Row

*State Has Improved in 13 of 16 Child Well-Being Indicators Since 1990, Including
Significant Gains in the Number of Children Who Have Health Insurance*

CHARLESTON, W. Va. — For the second year running, **West Virginia ranks 37th in the nation in child well-being**, according to the 2014 national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* released today. The *Data Book's* 16 indicators of child well-being are divided into four domains: economic well-being, education, health and family and community. **West Virginia's best domain ranking was in economic well-being (28th)**, followed by family and community (33rd), health (35th) and education (46th).

The state's best individual indicator rankings included teens ages 12 to 17 who abused alcohol or drugs in the past year (2nd); children in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (4th); and children without health insurance (5th). **Our worst individual rankings were children ages 3 to 4 not attending pre-school (47th)**; 8th graders who scored below proficient math level (46th) and the teen birth rate (45th).

"Since 2005, West Virginia has made significant investments in improving the health of our children, and those investments are starting to reap big dividends," said Margie Hale, Executive Director of West Virginia KIDS COUNT. "We have reduced the number of uninsured children to only 4 percent thanks to the expansion of our Children's Health Insurance Program. And, with the recent Medicaid expansion and the launch of the Affordable Care Act, we can expect even further improvements in this area." Hale added, "Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go in terms of improving our education system. **If we want to improve our national education rank of 46 and give our kids a fair shot at success, we need to make significant new investments in our youngest children where we know the returns are enormous. In particular, we need to focus on increasing the number of three-year-olds who have access to a high-quality pre-school experience.**"

Nationally, Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa, New Hampshire and Minnesota rank highest for overall child well-being, while Arizona, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico and Mississippi rank lowest. Three southwestern states — Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico — are once again in the

bottom five for the overall rankings. **West Virginia has been 37th in the nation for two years running.**

Forty-nine states, including West Virginia and the District of Columbia, saw improvements in math proficiency, but a considerable gap lies between Massachusetts with only 45 percent of its eighth-graders not proficient in the subject, and Alabama with 80 percent. **Despite improvements in this indicator since 2005, West Virginia is 46th in the nation in 8th grade math proficiency. In 2013, 76 percent of the state’s 8th graders scored below proficient in math, compared to 82 percent in 2005.**

Demographic, social and economic changes combined with major policy developments have affected the lives of lower-income children in both positive and negative ways since 1990, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 25th edition of its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. Nationally, there has been steady improvement in the numbers of children attending preschool and a decline in the number of schoolchildren not proficient in reading and math. There also is a positive trend in parental education that benefits kids: A smaller percentage of children live in families in which no parent has a high school diploma. In addition, the national teen birth rate is at a historic low, and the death rates for children and teens has fallen. Worrisome national trends include a rise in the official child poverty rate as defined by the federal government and in the percentage of children living in single-parent families.

On the state level, since 1990, West Virginia has improved in 13 of 16 indicators of child well-being and gotten worse in three. The two biggest areas of improvement have been the number of children without health insurance and children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma. On the downside, there has been a 75 percent increase in the number of West Virginia children in single parent families since 1990. **More than 1 in 3 of the state’s children now lives in a single parent household.**

“With advances in neuroscience, as well as solid research on what works, we now know more than ever before about how to give children a good start and help them meet major developmental milestones throughout childhood,” said Patrick McCarthy, the Foundation’s president and CEO. “On several fronts, we’ve seen the difference that smart policies, effective programs and high quality practice can make in improving child well-being and long term outcomes. We should all be encouraged by the improvements in many well-being indicators in the health, education and safety areas.”

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation, and is available on the Casey Foundation [website](#). Information is also available in the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which 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.

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West Virginia KIDS COUNT's vision is to make West Virginia a great place to be a kid. Founded in 1990, KIDS COUNT provides the most trusted information about the well-being of children and builds alliances to advocate for what kids need. The non-profit organization's signature program is the KIDS COUNT Data Book, an annual, county-by-county report of child well-being in West Virginia. To learn more about the organization's mission, history and programs, go to www.wvkidscount.org.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.