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Kentucky Ranks 34th Overall in Child Outcomes Highlighting Continued Areas of Need

KIDS COUNT® Data Book *provides comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the U.S.*

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky — Kentucky ranks 34th in the nation in overall child well-being, according to the 30th edition of the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Kentucky's measurable but still inadequate improvements are due in part to progress across several areas of economic well-being, child health coverage, teen births and parental employment. Nevertheless, 22 percent of Kentucky children live in poverty and 10 percent of children live in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma.

"The challenge of the *Data Book* — or any quality piece of research — lies in the answer to the question, 'So what?'" said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "This national report card on kids can become a catalyst for informed and thoughtful policy innovation for Kentucky's children. Possibly even more critical given the environment in which we find ourselves today, the 'so what?' of the *Data Book* can provide a common ground for progress as we enter a highly contested and polarized campaign season."

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Kentucky ranks:

- **37th in economic well-being.** Despite Kentucky's improvement in economic well-being since 2010, other states are improving at a faster pace. More than one in five children is living in poverty. Thirty-one percent of children live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, though the figure improved by 16 percent from 2010 to 2017. Now at 7 percent, the percent of teens ages 16 to 19 not attending school and not working has also improved since 2010.
- **27th in education.** The good news is that nine in 10 Kentucky high school students are graduating on time — ranking the commonwealth second in the nation on this indicator. The bad news is that there continues to be no significant progress from 2009 to 2017 in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math proficiency. Currently, 62 percent of fourth-graders are below proficient in reading and 71 percent of eighth-graders are below proficient in math. Additionally, 59 percent of children ages three to four are not attending school in Kentucky; this figure worsened by 4 percent from 2009-2011 to 2015-2017.
- **43rd in the family and community domain.** Between 2010 and 2017, the teen birth rate in Kentucky fell by 37



Kentucky's *independent* voice for kids

percent to 29 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. The percent of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma also decreased during that time, down to 10 percent. The share of children living in high-poverty areas remains at 16 percent.

- **25th in health.** Kids' health coverage remains a bright spot for Kentucky, with 4 percent of children not covered — putting the commonwealth at a slightly lower rate than the nation (5 percent). Two other areas of child health that have also improved since 2010 are the percent of low birth-weight babies (at 8.8 percent) and the child and teen death rate (at 31 per 100,000 youth ages 1 to 19), though neither change was statistically significant.

“The more than 1 million children in Kentucky are our future business leaders, policymakers, health professionals, educators and skilled trade workers. They need strong families and supportive communities, as well as smart policies, to help them thrive,” said Brooks.

Kentucky Youth Advocates urges policymakers and child advocates to prioritize policies and programs that would expand opportunity for Kentucky's growing child population.

Recommendations:

- *Provide the tools proven to help families lift themselves up economically.* Investments in a refundable state earned income tax credit (EITC) and expanded child care supports would enable more low-income working parents to provide for their families while reinvesting money in their local economy. Additionally, paid family leave allows parents to care for themselves and their children when they have a new child or fall ill, without pushing the family into debt or putting their employment at risk.
- *Sustain programs and support policies that help keep kids healthy.* To sustain child health gains in Kentucky, we must continue diligent efforts to reach and enroll eligible children in Kentucky's Children's Health Insurance Program (KCHIP). In Frankfort, leaders must ensure any changes to Medicaid recognize that parent coverage is key to keeping children covered. Also, raising the legal age to purchase tobacco products to 21 would help prevent lifelong addiction to nicotine and the resulting negative health outcomes for our youngest Kentuckians.
- *Strengthen early learning supports to encourage achievement into adulthood.* Investments in early literacy instruction and quality child care programs can set children up for academic achievement, meaning improved reading and math proficiency and readiness to graduate from high school and begin college or a career.
- *Count all kids.* Ensure the 2020 census counts all children, especially those under 5 years old and from hard-to-count areas. The 2010 census missed 12,500 young children in Kentucky and the upcoming count offers a statewide, community-by-community opportunity to ensure each child is counted and therefore planned for in local, state and federal budgets. Without an accurate count of all kids in 2020, Kentucky risks leaving real money on the table that could be used for health care, education, child care and other vital programs many young children in low-income families count on for a healthy and strong start in life.

“The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* gives elected leaders — and candidates for governor and other constitutional offices — a real chance to affirm that, ‘Kids do count with me!’ Here's hoping we hear that refrain from every candidate for every office, with Governor Bevin and Attorney General Beshear leading the chorus,” said Brooks.

Release Information

The 2019 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* will be available at www.aecf.org/databook. View Kentucky's state data profile here. Journalists and advocates interested in creating map and graphs can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org. The 2019 *Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book*, which includes county-level child well-being data, will be released in November.

About Kentucky Youth Advocates

Kentucky Youth Advocates believes all children deserve to be safe, healthy and secure. As THE independent voice for Kentucky's children, we work to ensure policymakers create investments and policies that are good for children. Learn more at www.kyyouth.org.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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.