



Embargoed for Release:
until 11:01 p.m. CDT on June 20, 2016

Contact: Adam Muhlendorf, [Longleaf Strategies](mailto:adam@longleafstrategies.com)
adam@longleafstrategies.com; (334) 625-0175

Alabama Lags Behind the Rest of the Nation in Improving Well-Being of Children

MONTGOMERY – According to a new national report released today, the state of Alabama lags behind the rest of the country in improving the overall well-being of its children.

This finding is part of the annual 2016 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* produced by the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#). In this year's report, the Annie E. Casey Foundation looked at 16 indicators in four issue areas: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community, to determine how well children are doing in each state and our nation as a whole. The *2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book* was compiled using national and state level data between approximately 2008 and 2014.

Compared to other states, the 2016 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* ranks Alabama 46th nationally in overall child well-being. Although Alabama improved in some of the indicators tracked since 2008, this is the second year in a row that Alabama has seen its overall national ranking drop.

"While we are certainly pleased to see progress in some of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* indicators over the last six years, it is hard to applaud where we stand relative to the rest of the country," said **Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW, executive director of VOICES for Alabama's Children**. "In order to improve our state standing, we must look beyond the rankings and study the story behind the numbers."

[VOICES for Alabama's Children](#), which is the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *KIDS COUNT* grantee in Alabama, has analyzed this year's *KIDS COUNT* data and looked at what the state needs to do to improve the well-being of Alabama's children.

The 2016 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows Alabama's children improved the most in the health measurements and saw progress in all four health indicators. Since 2008, the percentage of children in Alabama without health insurance decreased by 50 percent to a low of four percent, and the percent of Alabama teens who abuse alcohol or drugs decreased by 29 percent to five percent, the fifth lowest percentage in the country. In addition, the state saw significant decreases in low-birth weight babies and child and teen deaths.

Furthermore, since 2008, Alabama's teen birth rate has decreased by 37 percent, and the percentage of Alabama children who live in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma decreased by 13 percent. In this year's report, Alabama's children fared the worst in the economic domain. The report found no change or worsening results in all four

economic measurements. Since 2008, the percentage of children in poverty has increased by 27 percent, the percentage of children whose parents lack secure employment has increased by 13 percent and the percentage of children living in households with a high housing cost burden (more than 30 percent of pretax income on housing) has increased by 3 percent. The percent of teens not in school and not working did not change.

Additionally, the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas also grew by 31 percent compared to 2006-2010, while the percentage of children living in single-parent families increased by 11 percent compared to 2008.

Alabama's children also fared poorly in the report's review of education indicators. While the percentage of high school students not graduating on time has improved by 16 percent since 2007/2008, the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* found that the percentage of three- and four-year-olds not enrolled in preschool has increased. Furthermore, this year's *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows that the fourth-grade reading proficiency has not improved and the percentage of eighth graders not proficient in math remains the worst in the country.

"With the implementation of Plan 2020, Alabama leaders have begun taking steps to improve our children's educational outcomes, but the results will take time before we start to see our test numbers come up," **said Bridgeforth**. "The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* demonstrates how important it is for Alabama to stay the course with its College- and Career-Ready Standards, and why we must continue to increase access to high-quality Pre-K classrooms. We will continue to work with state leaders to identify where they should focus their attention."

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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information visit www.aecf.org.

VOICES for Alabama's Children is a statewide nonprofit that works to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness, and advocacy. For more information, see www.alavoices.org.

-END-