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New Report Finds Sharp Decline in Well-Being of Maine Children Despite National Trends

Maine drops to 17th for overall child well-being in the latest KIDS COUNT report

AUGUSTA, Maine— New data show that American children and teens are experiencing better health and education outcomes, yet they still face significant economic challenges. In the 2016 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today, the Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that child well-being has improved nationally as a result of federal and state policies that address barriers to success for children and families. However, the report also finds that child well-being has declined dramatically in some states, including Maine.

This year, Maine ranks 17th for overall child well-being, dropping five spots in the overall ranking from just last year. Big drops in overall rankings were also observed in Alaska, Maryland and Kansas. Minnesota continued its number one ranking from the previous year, followed by Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire and Connecticut.

The 2016 *Data Book*, which focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health and family and community. Comparing the data between roughly 2008 and 2014, it is clear that Maine children are not seeing the same results as the rest of the nation, with many data points staying relatively the same or worsening in almost all four categories.

“Too many Maine children and families are experiencing the consequences of a stagnant state economy,” said Claire Berkowitz, executive director of the Maine Children’s Alliance. “But with strong federal, state and local policies and investments, we can improve outcomes for our children and they, in turn, can lead our state into a prosperous future.”

In Maine and across the U.S., persistent poverty continues to be an underlying problem for children and families, with many families struggling to get a sound foothold in today’s economy. Despite declining unemployment numbers, the child poverty rate in the U.S. remained the same in 2014 as in the previous year, at 22 percent. At 19 percent, Maine’s child poverty rate remained below the national average, yet the rate has steadily increased over the last six years, with 6,000 more children living in poverty in 2014 than in 2008.

The good news is that children and teens are stepping up to position themselves for future success, with the percentage of teens abusing drugs and alcohol declining by double digits since 2008 in every state except Louisiana and the District of Columbia. In Maine, the percent of teens abusing substances fell by 38 percent. Child and teen death rates have also declined in all states except two, Utah and West Virginia, with an 11 percent drop in Maine.

Nevertheless, in most areas, the new data reveal that Maine consistently defies key positive trends in child well-being observed nationally, from the state's decline in health care coverage to stagnant educational outcomes.

Since 2008 the national rate of uninsured children has declined by 40 percent in part due to programs like the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid Expansion and the Child Health Insurance Program. In Maine, the number of uninsured children has steadily risen over the past four years, with 16,000 Maine children living without health care coverage in 2014, up from 11,000 in 2010.

The percentage of Maine children proficient in reading and math is slightly above the national average, but there is opportunity for improvement. Maine's reading and math proficiency levels experienced little change from 2013 to 2014, with 36 percent of Maine fourth graders proficient in reading and 35 percent of Maine's eighth graders proficient in math.

"Our children already have the capacity to become caring, successful and productive adults," said Bill Cumming, board chair of the Maine Children's Alliance. "It is our responsibility to ensure they have the resources, support and opportunity to fulfill their potential."

The 2016 *Data Book* will be available June 21, 2016 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

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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.

The Maine Children's Alliance (MCA) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes sound policies and practices for Maine children, youth and families. MCA is part of the national KIDS COUNT network, a state-by-state effort funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the status of children across the United States.