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Virginia Now Ranks 10th Nationally for Child Well-Being; However, Children in Low-Income Families Still Fall Behind

Improvements Point to Positive Impact of Past Investment, but a Closer Look Reveals Challenges Ahead

RICHMOND, Va., June 13, 2017 — Virginia has continued to make strides for kids and is ranked 10th for overall child well-being, according to a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation released today. The *2017 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, which measures child well-being in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community — shows positive gains for Virginia in several key areas.

According to the annual report, one notable improvement has been the marked decline in the number of children without health insurance. An additional 30,000 children in the Commonwealth gained health coverage in the last five years and in 2015, only 5 percent of all children in Virginia lacked health coverage. Much of this progress can be attributed to Virginia's Medicaid and FAMIS programs. The state is ranked 16th in child health overall.

Virginia has also improved in child economic well-being, moving up three spots to 12th place in this domain. Compared to the previous year, 32,000 fewer children live in households with a high housing cost burden, and fewer kids are in families where neither parent has full-time, year-round employment in 2015.

Despite this economic progress, some children continue to face obstacles. From 2010 to 2015, an additional 8,000 children lived in poverty, signaling no real improvement. During that same time, the percentage of children living in areas of concentrated poverty also has not improved, remaining at 5 percent.

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“The fact that we continue to see nearly one in every six children living below the poverty line, with even more of those kids compacted together in fewer neighborhoods, means we cannot not ignore the impact childhood poverty has on Virginia’s future economic prosperity,” said Beth Nolan, KIDS COUNT director of Voices for Virginia’s Children.

“Nationally, we’ve seen a 5 percent decline in the number of children living in poverty in the last five years. Yet, Virginia is going in the opposite direction and has seen a 7 percent increase. The question we need to answer is: why is this happening?”

Research shows that there is a high cost to poverty. Children who grow up economically disadvantaged have an increased likelihood of struggling in school and dropping out, becoming involved in the juvenile justice system and having poor health.

“Virginia is on the right path, with only 5 percent of our kids lacking health insurance and multiple gains in a number of areas within child well-being. We must protect the gains we’ve made and consider what gains are still needed to ensure that every child has opportunities that lead to prosperity for them and the Commonwealth,” said Nolan.

Release Information

The *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

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About Voices for Virginia’s Children

Voices for Virginia’s Children wants every child in Virginia to grow up in a safe and stable environment with the ability to thrive. We are the only multi-issue, statewide child advocacy organization in the Commonwealth. Nonprofit and non-partisan, we champion public policies that improve the lives of Virginia’s 1.9 million children. Voices is home to the KIDS COUNT Data Center for Virginia, thanks to a partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more than 20 years, we have tracked multiple indicators on the well-being of Virginia’s children, and used that information to identify unmet needs and inform policy recommendations. Because we update this information annually, we are able to produce historical trend data across a variety of indicators, including those related to economic well-being, health, education, family, and community. To learn more about Voices and our KIDS COUNT Data Center, please visit www.vakids.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.