

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 a.m. EDT July 22, 2014

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Annual *KIDS COUNT* Report Shows Decline in Child Well-Being for Oklahoma Children

State is among those with largest decline in overall rankings in the U.S.

OKLAHOMA CITY – The state of Oklahoma ranks among the worst in the nation in the overall well-being of its children according to the 25th edition *KIDS COUNT Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The state's ranking dropped from 36th in 2013 to 39th this year among the 50 states; one of the largest declines in the U.S.

The report ranks states based on their performance in 16 indicators across four domains: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community. Oklahoma slightly improved its ranking in two of the four areas: Health moved up to 41st from 43rd, and Family and Community moved to 38th from 39th. Economic Well-Being and Education worsened, dropping to 30th from 25th and 40th to 41st, respectively.

"We are pleased to see even a slight improvement in key indicators for well-being, but sadly, our state is not even close to the national average for most of our rankings," said Terry Smith, President/CEO of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, which directs Oklahoma *KIDS COUNT*. "The fact is that, even in areas where our state has made progress, we still fall far short of the strides other states are making in improving the lives of their children."

The report shows nearly one in four Oklahoma children are living in poverty (24 percent). One in ten teens ages 16-19 years (10 percent) is not attending school and not working – a 25 percent increase between 2008 and 2012. The number of children living in high-poverty areas, defined as census tracts with poverty rates greater or equal to 30 percent, has more than doubled, increasing from 5 percent in 2000 to 12 percent in 2008-12.

Positive trends outlined in the report include the 13 percent reduction in births to teens ages 15-19 years, decreasing the birth rate from 54 teen births per 1,000 in 2005 to 47 teen births per 1,000 in 2012. Student proficiency in reading improved by 7 percent and math proficiency improved by 5 percent between 2005 and 2013. The child and teen death rate decreased by 20 percent, improving from 45 deaths per 100,000 in 2005 to 36 deaths per 100,000 in 2012.

Investments in education, access to health care and moving more families out of poverty and into the middle class appear to be the key policy issues for Oklahoma to address to improve the well-being of the state's children, according to Smith.

"After a brief improvement in the rankings due to the recession's impacts on the rest of the nation, Oklahoma has begun to fall again as the overall economy improves," said Smith. "This is a clear indication that we have not been making the kinds of smart investments in children that we should be. The state's economy is growing; however at a time when our children should be thriving, we are seeing state revenue shortfalls, budget cuts to vital programs like Medicaid, and more kids living in extreme poverty."

The most recent trends between 2005 and 2012, show:

- **Economic instability is increasingly an issue for Oklahoma children.** Three of the four indicators of economic well-being worsened and the fourth showed no change. More children live in poverty, more teens are not in school and not working, and more parents lack secure employment. While the severity of the national economic crisis over the past six years has undoubtedly had an effect on children's economic well-being, there is still little sign of improvement for many children in the state.
- **Children are progressing slightly in the areas of education and health.** All four education indicators covering milestones, such as preschool attendance and high school graduation showed some improvements. Child health also improved across three of the four indicators. There were drops in child and teen mortality, teen substance abuse, and the percentage of children without health insurance.
- **Fluctuation among Family and Community indicators persists.** The teen birth rate is at a historic low in Oklahoma, however the state ranks 49th in the nation for teen birth rates. There was a small drop in the percentage of children living in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma. However, there was an increase in the percentage of children living in single-parent families and the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas more than doubled.

Ranking highest in the report for overall child well-being are Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa, New Hampshire and Minnesota, while Arizona, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico and Mississippi rank lowest.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>. The KIDS COUNT Data Center also 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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About the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA)

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is a non-partisan, 501(c)3 non-profit organization that creates awareness, takes action and changes policy to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of children and youth. More information can be found at www.oica.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,

healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

About KIDS COUNT

KIDS COUNT is a project that utilizes data and research to support smart decisions about children and families. A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the KIDS COUNT Data Center is the premier source for data on child and family well-being in the United States. Visit <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/> to access hundreds of indicators, download data and create reports and graphics. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.