



**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
UNTIL 3:00 a.m. June 12, 2008**

Contact:

Linda Tilly
334-213-2410 x 106 or 334-546-1995
ltilly@alavoices.org

Lisa Parrish
334-313-2114
lparrish@alavoices.org

2008 KIDS COUNT DATA Book: A Snapshot of Child Well-Being in Alabama

Child well-being in Alabama continues to improve.

According to the 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* released nationally by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and in state through VOICES for Alabama's Children, five of ten measures reflecting child well-being in Alabama show increasing signs of progress. Overall, the 19th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* puts Alabama trends on par with national trends.

"The expansion of high quality pre-k, the Alabama Juvenile Justice Act of 2008, and the initiatives at the Department of Children's Affairs offer solutions that will make a difference for Alabama children and improve our future KIDS COUNT standings," said Linda Tilly, executive director of VOICES for Alabama's Children.

According to the 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, adolescents fare best in Alabama. They are safer and more likely to be enrolled in school as compared with a decade ago. The teen death rate, teen birth rate, percentage of teens who drop out of high school, and the percent of teens not attending school and not working are four areas in which Alabama can boast improvement. In addition, the child death rate has improved.

Indicators that detail the well-being of babies are either stable or worsening. The infant mortality rate had no change while the number of low birth weight babies increased.

Children thrive when their parents have adequate opportunities and resources. The 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows Alabama families continue to struggle.

- Nearly one in four children (23%) lives in poverty; the national average is closer to one in five (21%).
- More than one in three children live in a single parent family (37%) compared with 32% nationally.
- More than a third (36%) of children in Alabama lives in families where no parent has full-time year round employment. The national statistic is 33%.

“Alabama is like the train in the children’s story, The Little Engine That Could. We are moving forward, gaining momentum, and making some hard won improvements for children. But we still have to cross over that mountain and right now, other states are going as fast or faster and making more progress than we are,” stated Linda Tilly. .

The 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* puts special emphasis on new approaches to juvenile justice and contains specific new indicators that call attention to concerns with our current system for young offenders. For every one youth detained and committed to state juvenile justice systems nationally, nearly two are detained or committed in Alabama. Similarly, more young people are behind bars in Alabama for non-violent offenses such as shoplifting, disorderly conduct, truancy, running away from home, or ungovernable behavior.

In line with its focus on juvenile justice measures in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation is supporting pilot programs for detention alternatives in four Alabama counties. Local Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) sites in Montgomery, Mobile, Jefferson and Tuscaloosa Counties separate youth who pose significant risks from those who do not. The idea is to reduce the overall use of confinement. Such programs will help improve future child well-being in the state.

Judge Brian Huff is Presiding Judge of the Family Court of Jefferson County where the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative is being piloted. According to Huff, “It is often easier for the court to simply put a young person in detention. It takes time, effort and money to really examine the cause of the child’s behavior and provide more appropriate solutions such as mental health counseling or other family support programs. We are hopeful that the Alabama Juvenile Justice Act passed recently by the Alabama Legislature will foster a new approach to youth services.”

The 2008 *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* is the companion to the national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and will be published by VOICES for Alabama’s Children in early fall.