



## **PRESS RELEASE**

July 27, 2010

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **2010 KIDS COUNT Report: NM Back in Bottom Five States in Child Well-Being Persistent child poverty, high teen birth rate keep NM in bottom ten**

ALBUQUERQUE—New Mexico’s national ranking slid to 46<sup>th</sup> in this year’s KIDS COUNT Data Book; down from last year’s 43<sup>rd</sup>. The report, released annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranks the states on ten indicators of child well-being, ranging from the prevalence of low birth-weight babies to child poverty and teen death rates. New Mexico has ranked in the bottom ten since the Casey Foundation began issuing the report in 1990, and more often than not in the bottom five.

“New Mexico has made some important investments in child well-being over the last eight years,” said Christine Hollis, who directs the KIDS COUNT program for New Mexico Voices for Children, “particularly with the launch of NM Pre-K and increased per-pupil expenditures in our K-12 system. But we still lag behind the rest of the nation when it comes to making kids our top priority in budget and policy decisions. Until we do, New Mexico will be unable to achieve greater economic success,” she added.

“What’s even more sobering,” Hollis continued, “is that the economic data, which come from the 2008 American Community Survey, do not yet reflect the worst of the Great Recession. As we receive more data that reflect recent budget cuts in programs that serve children, the worse this picture will get.”

Of the ten indicators, New Mexico ranked lowest on the teen birth rate (49<sup>th</sup> in the nation), closely followed by teen death rate and the percent of children in single-parent families (both at 48<sup>th</sup>). Next are the percent of children in poverty, and percent of teens who are not in school and are not high school graduates (both at 47<sup>th</sup>). The one bright spot is the state’s infant mortality rate (13<sup>th</sup> in the nation); the only indicator for which New Mexico does better than the national average.

“Our child poverty rate – which is almost 25 percent – is probably the most telling factor,” said Eric Griego, Executive Director of NM Voices for Children. “Child

poverty is a very accurate predictor of school success, which in turn affects graduation rates, incarceration rates, and the state's overall economic well-being,”

Although New Mexico's overall poverty rate for children under age 18 is 24 percent, the situation is worse for children of color – with 39 percent of Native American children in poverty, 30 percent of Hispanic children, and 25 percent of African American children.

While things are likely to get worse before they get better, some changes on the horizon offer potential for improvement.

“First, the state needs to commit to implementing the federal health reform,” said Griego. “Also, we need to act on the nationally-accepted fact that high quality early childhood programs improve outcomes for children from birth into adulthood. We would be seeing far fewer of these disturbing statistics year after year if we invested earlier and more seriously in our kids.”

The New Mexico page of the 2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book is attached separately as a pdf. The entire report is available online at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). More information and other reliable data regarding child well-being are available on the New Mexico Data Center page at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/nm>.



KIDS COUNT is a program of New Mexico Voices for Children and is made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

NM Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

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