



PRESS RELEASE

January 21, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Christine Hollis, KIDS COUNT Program Director

505-244-9505 ext. 34, 505-710-6687 (c), chollis@nmvoices.org

OR: Sharon Kayne, Communications Director, New Mexico Voices for Children

505-244-9505 ext. 30 (p), 505-401-8709 (c), 505-244-9509 (f), skayne@nmvoices.org

2009 NM KIDS COUNT Report: NM Must Make Kids Its Top Priority to Improve State's Economic Outlook

ALBUQUERQUE—New Mexico needs to make the well-being of its children its highest priority or it will continue to have a weak economic base and a low quality of life for everyone. That's the conclusion of the *2009 KIDS COUNT in New Mexico: A snapshot of children's well-being* report, which was released today at a press conference at the state Capitol.

The annual report, which is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, presents data on child well-being on a county-by-county basis and includes an essay on how shortcomings can be addressed.

Despite the current recession, New Mexico can implement a pro-family/pro-child policy framework. This means continuing to invest in four key, cost-effective strategies that lead to positive economic outcomes while improving the quality of life for children.

"Long-term studies show that high quality early childhood care and development; a first-rate K-12 educational system that graduates all students; quality health care with affordable health insurance; and effective family support systems provide social and economic benefits for all residents by reducing crime, dependence on welfare, and the other ills associated with poverty," said Christine Hollis, New Mexico Voices for Children's KIDS COUNT Director.

According to the *2009 New Mexico KIDS COUNT* book, New Mexico is still one of the lowest-ranked states in the nation in terms of child well-being. The state has the fourth highest rate of children without health insurance, more than one-quarter of its children live in poverty, and only four other states have a higher percentage of families who are hungry or "food insecure." Though quality childcare is critical for parents to work or train for jobs, state funding to help low-income families afford childcare has been severely cut back. Despite the fact that high quality early childhood education programs provide the stimulation needed for healthy growth and brain development, New Mexico only allocates about 1.8 percent of its budget to support this.

"Research shows that good quality early childhood programs not only prepare children for success in school and life, but also give society a return on investment of up to \$16 for each

\$1 spent," said Gerry Bradley, Research Director for NM Voices. "It's one of the most cost-effective things we can do, since we'll lower dropout rates, reduce crime, and improve employment rates over time."

Over the past decade, state government expanded investment in Medicaid, childcare assistance, and education, especially Pre-K and K-12. "We're just about to see some positive change, and now, most of these improvements are being cut," said Hollis. "Instead of hurting families who are struggling even more right now, we need supportive policies for early childhood care and development, a continuum of quality K-12 education, health care coverage, and family supports."

This year's New Mexico KIDS COUNT report provides some of the most recent economic, health, education and other data from reliable sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau. This and other data related to child well-being are also found on the New Mexico page in the web-based KIDS COUNT Data Center (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook>). This data center also includes information on national, state, county and metropolitan levels. Information specific to New Mexico is found at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/nm>.

The full *Kids Count in New Mexico: A snapshot of children's well-being* report is available as a pdf at www.nmvoices.org

###



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.

2340 Alamo SE, Suite 120, Albuquerque, NM 87106-3523; 505-244-9505 (p); www.nmvoices.org