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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases Annual Factbook on the Status of Rhode Island's Children

New indicators on Gun Violence, Preschool Special Education, and Schools Identified for Intervention included in the 2013 Factbook

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Warwick, RI (April 8, 2013) - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its nineteenth annual report on the well-being of Rhode Island's children at a policy breakfast attended by over 500 people, including the Governor, members of the Rhode Island Congressional Delegation, General Assembly leaders, community leaders, and policymakers from education, health, and human services. The event took place on **Monday, April 8, 2013**, from **8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.** at the **Crowne Plaza**, 801 Greenwich Avenue, Warwick. The *2013 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* charts improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth across the state and in each of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, and provides the latest available statistics on 68 different aspects of children's lives, from birth through adolescence. The *Factbook* indicators are grouped into five interrelated categories: family and community, economic well-being, health, safety, and education.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, opened the policy breakfast by highlighting the advancements made in the past year and the challenges that remain. "Our state's economic future depends on healthy children and strong families," stated Bryant. "We need to ensure that Rhode Island's public policy investments in child care, early education, health care, K-12 and adult education are maintained for our children's progress today and in the future."

Youth Speaker Ivy Barclay, a member of Young Voices and a junior at Paul Cuffee School, spoke of her commitment to improving education for fellow youth in Rhode Island. "The opportunity to speak to you all this morning is a real dream for me. I am determined to become successful in life, and also want my peers to have the chance to succeed. This is why I work so hard through Young Voices to improve our education system in Rhode Island, so all children and youth can fulfill on their dreams as well."

The Junior Chorus of first and second graders from Lillian Feinstein/Sackett Street School performed two songs.

Presentation of the Factbook to State Leaders

Bryant presented the *2013 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to Governor Lincoln Chafee, the state's entire Congressional Delegation, Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Roberts, General Treasurer Gina Raimondo, House Speaker Gordon Fox, Senate President Teresa Paiva Weed, and other policymakers and community leaders. "The information presented in the *2013 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* can help our state leaders and policymakers make well-informed decisions about the programs and policies that are most important to ensuring the success of our children and our state," Bryant stated.

Notable Improvements and Declines in Child Well-Being

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Poverty and Income Disparities

- **Poverty is related to every KIDS COUNT indicator, and impacts a child at every stage of development.** Nationally, Rhode Island ranked 27th among states for the number of children in poverty, and the worst (6th) among New England states in 2011 (a one-year average). Between 2007 and 2011, 17.9% of children (39,900) lived below the federal poverty threshold (\$18,498 for a family of three).
- **Poverty is found disproportionately in the four core cities,** in which 35.3% of children live below the poverty threshold, compared with 9.4% of children in the remainder of the state. The four core cities are the communities with the highest percentage of children living in poverty -- 36.9% in Central Falls, 29.4% in Pawtucket, 37.3% in Providence, and 35.8% in Woonsocket.
- **Growing income gaps.** The income gap between Rhode Island's richest and poorest families is growing, and Rhode Island is among the top ten states with the fastest growing income inequality. The wealthiest 20% of families in Rhode Island have average incomes that are 7.5 times larger than the average incomes of the poorest 20% of families.

Continued Effects of the Recession in Rhode Island

- **High unemployment continues to stress Rhode Island families.** In 2012, 13% of Rhode Island children had at least one unemployed parent. Rhode Island's December 2012 unemployment rate was 9.9%, the highest in the U.S. Children with unemployed parents are at increased risk for homelessness, child abuse or neglect, and failure to finish high school or college.
- **Rising housing costs.** In 2012, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,176 or 92% of the monthly earnings of a full-time worker earning the minimum wage. In 2010,

26% of Rhode Island's working households spent more than half their income on housing costs, making Rhode Island the most housing cost-burdened state in New England.

- **Increasing numbers of homeless children.** The number of homeless children staying at homeless shelters in Rhode Island rose 17% from 2011 to 2012, from 1,092 homeless children to 1,277 homeless children.
- **The importance of income support programs, such as SNAP and School Breakfast.** Between 2007 and 2012, the number of Rhode Islanders receiving emergency food assistance doubled. Children participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased by 84% between 2005 and 2012. SNAP participation increased by 57% in the four core cities and by 153% in the remainder of the state during this time period. During the 2012-2013 school year, 16 of the 24 school districts in Rhode Island with severe need schools (schools in which 40% or more of students qualify for free or reduced-price schools meals) did not offer universal school breakfast. After implementing breakfast in the classroom in several districts around the state, including all 25 elementary schools in Providence, Rhode Island achieved a 23% increase in breakfast participation by low-income students from the 2010-2011 to the 2011-2012 school year.

“The lingering recession and high unemployment in Rhode Island continue to have a negative impact on children and families,” noted Bryant. “Income support programs are critical for helping low- and moderate-income working families in Rhode Island make ends meet during difficult economic times, and providing children with the nutrition they need to pay attention and excel in school.”

- **Reduced employment opportunities for teens.** Nationally, youth employment is at its lowest level since World War II, with 26% of teens ages 16 to 19 employed. Of the Rhode Island youth not in school and not working, 40% were females and 60% were males. Fifty-two percent of these youth had not graduated from high school.

HEALTH

Many Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes Show Improvements

- **Overall birth rates have declined.** In 2011, the U.S. birth rate reached the lowest level ever recorded since 1920, when reliable record keeping began. The most recent decline began in 2007 coinciding with the national economic recession. Rhode Island is tied for the fourth lowest birth rate in the U.S. The total number of babies born to Rhode Island women has declined 12% between 2007 and 2012.
- **Decreased teen birth rate.** In 2010, the birth rate for U.S. teens fell to the lowest level ever recorded. Between 2007 and 2010, the teen birth rate in Rhode Island fell 24% to a new low of 22.3 births per 1,000 teens.

- **Fewer “infants born at highest risk.”** The number of Rhode Island babies born to unmarried teen mothers without a high school diploma (the three risk factors that define “highest risk”) fell 46% between 2007 and 2012. In 2012 in Rhode Island, 351 babies (3% of all babies) were born to unmarried teen mothers without high school diplomas.
- **Improved timely prenatal care for Rhode Island mothers.** Rhode Island ranked best in the nation for delivering timely prenatal care to pregnant women in 2010 (the most recent year for which national comparison data are available).
- **Fewer preterm births.** The rate of preterm births continues to fall in Rhode Island, with new low of 10.3% reached in 2011.

Declines in Some Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes

- **The percentage of babies born with low birthweights is increasing, indicating more work needs to be done.** Rhode Island’s low-birthweight rate increased by 24% between 1990 and 2010. Infants born at low birthweights are at greater risk for physical and developmental problems than infants of normal weights.
- **Racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant outcomes remain.** In Rhode Island, minority women are more likely than White women to receive delayed or no prenatal care and to have preterm births. Minority children are more likely to die in infancy than White children. Native Americans are the most likely to give birth as teenagers, followed by Hispanic and Black teens.

Improvements in Child and Adolescent Health

- **Reductions in childhood obesity.** The prevalence of obesity among children entering kindergarten is the lowest in ten years (15.5% in 2011-2012 school year, compared to 20.3% in 2004-2005 school year).
- **Immunization improvements.** Rhode Island ranked 13th best in the U.S. for children ages 19-35 months being “fully immunized,” up from 23rd the previous year. Rhode Island ranked first in the U.S. for two vaccines (1+ MMR and 3+ Hib) and third highest for four vaccines (3+ Polio, 3+ HepB, 4+ PCV, and rotavirus). Rhode Island also ranked first in the U.S. for adolescents receiving two HPV vaccines.
- **Children’s health insurance coverage remains strong.** Rhode Island ranks 10th best in the U.S. for children’s coverage, with 94.1% of children with health insurance
- **Gains in dental access.** The number of dentists accepting qualifying children with Medical Assistance coverage increased from 27 participating providers before RIte Smiles to 406 in September 2012. As of December 31, 2012, there were 61,258 children enrolled in RIte Smiles and 53% of all children with Medical Assistance received a dental service the previous State Fiscal Year, up from 43% of children seven years ago.

SAFETY

Improvements in Child and Youth Safety Outcomes

- **Continued declines in juvenile offenses and confinement.** Between 2006 and 2012, the number of juvenile offenses in Rhode Island declined by 38% and the number of youth referred to Family Court for wayward and delinquent offenses declined by 42%. The population of youth at the Training School declined 46% during this time period, from a peak of 1,123 in 2006 to a low of 606 in 2012. It is important to note that even as youth incarceration has decreased, juvenile crime has fallen sharply, indicating an overall downward trend in youth involvement in the juvenile justice system in Rhode Island.

“Alternatives to incarcerating youth, such as such as programs that are community-based, intensive, and involve the families of the youth, have been shown to be more successful in preventing recidivism and more cost-effective than incarceration,” noted Bryant. “These alternatives can help youth turn their lives around, reconnect with school, and place them on the path to success.”

- **Decrease in the number of children involved with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).** There has been a 28% decrease in the overall DCYF caseload, from 9,414 children in 2006, to 6,795 children in 2012. As of December 31, 2012, there were 1,947 children under the age of 21 in the care of DCYF who were in out-of-home placements, which is a 41% decrease from 2006.
- **Improved adoptions of children in DCYF Care.** In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2012, 46% of children in the Rhode Island welfare system were adopted within 24 months from the time of removal from their home. This was an increase from 39% who were adopted within 24 months in FFY 2011, and exceeds the national standard of 32%.

Declines in Child and Youth Safety Outcomes

- **Child maltreatment continues to take place in our communities.** Between 2007 and 2011, there were 166 hospitalizations and 15 deaths of Rhode Island children due to child abuse and/or neglect. In 2012, Rhode Island had 13.9 child victims of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, which was stable from the previous year (14.0 in 2011).
- **Increases in shelter care.** The number of children placed by DCYF in shelter care (facilities providing emergency care to eight children or less for no more than 90 days each) increased by 35% over the past year; from 37 children on January 5, 2012, to 50 children on January 2, 2013.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND K-16 EDUCATION

Opportunities and Improvements in Education Outcomes

- **More early learning programs participating in BrightStars.** As of January 2013, there were 169 early care and education programs (including 48 centers and 121 family child care homes) participating in BrightStars, Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs. In 2012, BrightStars awarded star rating increases to 20 programs that made significant quality improvements, which represents 19% of all eligible programs. One in five (21%) of all family child care homes and 15% of all child care centers and preschools in Rhode Island are participating in BrightStars.
- **Opportunities for universal full-day kindergarten.** During the 2012-2013 school year, 21 of Rhode Island's 35 school districts offered universal access to full-day kindergarten programs. Subject to appropriation, Rhode Island's *Full-Day Kindergarten Accessibility Act of 2012* will provide one-time, start-up funding to school districts transitioning from part-day kindergarten to providing universal access to full-day kindergarten beginning with the 2013-2014 school year.
- **Improvements in literacy.** In October 2012, 77% of Rhode Island eighth graders scored at or above proficiency in reading on the *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)* test, an increase from 55% in 2005, the first year the NECAP was given.

Challenges in Education Outcomes

- **Chronic early absence among kindergarteners through third graders.** During the 2011-2012 school year, 11% of Rhode Island children in grades K-3 were chronically absent (absent 18 days or more). In the four core cities, 19% of children in grades K-3 were chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism affects all students in a class because teachers may backtrack or slow the learning pace to review lessons for students who have missed school.
- **High rates of chronic absence among middle and high school students in the core cities.** The chronic absence rate among middle and high school students is twice as high in the four core cities as in the remainder of the state. During the 2011-2012 school year, 25% of middle school students and 40% of high school students in the four core cities were absent 18 or more days, compared to 10% of middle school students and 19% of high school students absent 18 or more days in the remainder of the state.
- **Suspensions.** In Rhode Island during the 2011-2012 school year, 10% of the student population was suspended at least once. More than one-third (37%) of all suspensions were for attendance-related offenses. In 2012, state legislation passed that prohibits schools from using a student's absenteeism as the sole basis for an out-of-school suspension.

- **Dropout rate remains high in core cities.** At 20%, the dropout rate in Rhode Island's four core cities remains more than twice as high as the remainder of the state (8%).
- **Math Skills.** As students progress in school, math proficiency drops. In October 2012, 64% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency on the *NECAP*, compared to 58% of eighth graders, and 34% of eleventh graders. In 2014, for the first time *NECAP* scores will be one of several criteria used to determine eligibility for high school graduation. In 2012, 40% of Rhode Island eleventh-grade students scored "substantially below proficient" in math. Rhode Island school districts are required to identify students who are not making progress in mathematics and provide them with specialized support.

New Indicators in the 2013 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook

This year's Factbook includes three new indicators that provide new information on the safety and education of Rhode Island's children and youth.

- **Gun Violence** is the number of firearm-related deaths and hospitalizations to Rhode Island children and youth under age 20. Children and youth can experience gun violence as a victim of firearm assaults, self-inflicted firearm injuries, or accidental shootings. Gun violence can also have an impact on children and youth when someone they know is the victim or perpetrator of a shooting. Of the 234 deaths of children in Rhode Island between 2007 and 2011, 22 (9%) were the result of firearms. There were 75 hospitalizations of children and youth for gun-related injuries in Rhode Island between 2007 and 2011.
- **Preschool Special Education** is the percentage of children ages three to kindergarten entry who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and are receiving special education services in Rhode Island. During the 2011-2012 school year, there were 2,927 preschool-age children who received special education services; 8% of all children ages three to five in Rhode Island.
- **Schools Identified for Intervention** is the percentage of Rhode Island public schools that are identified for intervention by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In 2012, Rhode Island replaced the previous system of classifying schools, which was based on whether schools "Met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)," with a new accountability system. The new system identifies each school's strengths and weaknesses and provides the support and interventions needed to help improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. Classification levels include: "Commended," "Leading," "Typical," "Warning," "Focus," and "Priority." Schools receiving classifications of "Focus" or "Priority" are identified for intervention. In 2012, 10% of schools in Rhode Island were identified for intervention, and 25 of these 29 schools were located in one of the four core cities.

Bryant concluded the Breakfast by stating, “The data highlighted in this year’s *Factbook* show that while the recession continues to take a toll on families across Rhode Island, we continue to make progress on critical children’s health and safety indicators. Our economic prosperity as a state will require accelerated, ongoing commitment to education and employment opportunities for children, youth, and families.”

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island’s children.