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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Kentucky's Young Adults Disconnected from Work, School**

#### **Kentucky Ranks 37<sup>th</sup> in Nation on Child Well-being**

*(June 3, 2004, Frankfort and Louisville, KY):* Kentucky ranks 37<sup>th</sup> among all states on child well-being in the United States according to the 2004 National KIDS COUNT Data Book. The state received its lowest ranks on measures of teen well-being. The 15<sup>th</sup> annual report, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, provides a state-by-state look at how children are faring. Kentucky showed no improvement when compared to five years ago on the percent of teens ages 16-19 not attending school and not working, and the state dropped in rank to 46<sup>th</sup> of the 50 states on that indicator. Though Kentucky's rate of teens who are high school dropouts improved, the state still ranks in the bottom ten among states.

Kentucky has made improvements on 6 of the 10 measures of child well-being over the past five years. The infant mortality rate dropped by 21 percent ranking Kentucky 13<sup>th</sup> best among the 50 states on that measure. The economic status of Kentucky's children improved: fewer children live in poverty and fewer live in families with no parent working full-time, year-round.

Though the state has made improvements in many areas, the picture is gloomy for many of Kentucky's youth. In 2002, 76,000 18- to 24-year-olds in Kentucky were not enrolled in school, were not working, and had no degree beyond high school. This number represents 20 percent of all Kentucky youth ages 18 to 24, five percentage points higher than the national rate of 15 percent. "These years after high school are a critical transition time, when we hope young people are acquiring the education, skills, and

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experience to become self-sufficient adults,” said Debra Miller, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. “The number of young adults in Kentucky who may not be prepared to support themselves and a family signals troubled waters ahead for them, their children, and for our state.”

Tara Grieshop, senior policy analyst at Kentucky Youth Advocates and KIDS COUNT coordinator, noted, “In recent years Kentucky has focused on early childhood programs and policies. While continuing our work in that arena, the data suggest we need to assess and strengthen our efforts to support teenagers in their transition to adulthood.” As KYA traveled the rural areas of the state last year interviewing families about raising children, the dearth of programs and activities for teens came up repeatedly.

Not all the news on teens was negative. The state showed improvement on some teen status indicators. The rate of births to females ages 15 to 17 dropped by 28 percent over the past five years, and the teen violent death rate dropped by 22 percent. Still, the state ranks in the bottom half among states on these two indicators.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children and families in the United States. The Casey Foundation also supports a national network of state organizations that produce county-by-county data on the well-being of children. Kentucky Youth Advocates and the Kentucky KIDS COUNT Consortium will release Kentucky’s county-by-county child well-being data in December of this year.

Copies of the 2004 KIDS COUNT Data Book, as well as previous years’ books, are available from Kentucky Youth Advocates, 2034 Frankfort Avenue, Louisville, KY 40206; 502-895-8167; tgrieshop@kyyouth.org or at [www.kyyouth.org](http://www.kyyouth.org) under KIDS COUNT.

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