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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**One in four Kentucky children lives in a single parent home**

*(January 17, Frankfort and Louisville, KY):* Children growing up today in Kentucky are much more likely to live in single parent homes than children growing up twenty years ago, according to the eleventh annual Kentucky KIDS COUNT report released today.

The report looks at two decades of family trends, including child living arrangements, family structures, and birth trends by examining Census data for 1980, 1990, and 2000 and Kentucky vital statistics data. The report paints a striking picture of what it means to Kentucky's children that so many are growing up with an absent parent. Single parents include those divorced, widowed, never married, and cohabiting.

The report finds that in Kentucky, 24 percent of children live with a single parent, compared to just fifteen percent of children two decades ago. "It's like saying that for every four school buses bringing children to school, one

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bus is filled with children who live in single parent homes. Two decades ago, it would have been just one in seven," said Valerie Salley, KIDS COUNT Coordinator and policy analyst at Kentucky Youth Advocates.

The data show that the increase in single parent households was consistent throughout the state, though the percent of children in single parent homes did vary across counties. For instance, in Oldham County, only 12 percent of children live in single parent homes versus 37 percent of children in Fulton County.

The report attributes part of the rise in single parent families to the corollary rise in births to unmarried mothers. In 1980, births to unmarried mothers represented 16 percent of all births in Kentucky. The latest data indicate that 30 percent —almost one in three—births is to an unmarried mother. The

report notes that divorce rates in Kentucky have remained relatively steady over the last two decades, peaking in the early 1990's. "An increase in divorce rates cannot explain the rising numbers of children in single parent homes," Salley said. "Kentucky is part of a national trend. More couples are living together instead of marrying, choosing to postpone marriage, or are no longer couples at time of their child's birth. "

According to Dr. Stephan Wilson, Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Kentucky's Department of Family Studies, "We know that children who grow up in low-conflict two-parent families, regardless of marital status, have better social outcomes. They're less likely to be poor, less likely to become teen parents, and more likely to pursue higher education than their peers who grow up without two involved parents."

The report underscores the importance of effective child support collection and affordable, quality child care for working families headed by single parents. While child support collection is improving statewide, still just over half of child support owed to families in 2001 was collected on their behalf. Of the \$345 million in child support owed to children in 2001, \$188 million was collected. "Too many families can't rely on child support today. As the number of single parent families grows, the situation could worsen," warned Salley.

The report also found that the cost of quality child care is out of reach for many families, especially single parent families. The average cost for full-time licensed child care for one infant and one preschooler in the state is \$157 per week (\$7,850 annually). In a median income family with two working parents, child care costs for an infant and preschooler are about 15 percent of their income. The same care for children of a single working parent would take about 30 percent of the parent's income.

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"These findings hit home for single parents. Parenting is hard work and the challenges of parenting are at least doubled when there is one less parent to spend time with children and one less parent to share the bills," said Salley.

#### **Other Findings in the 2001 KIDS COUNT County Data Book:**

- Most children (67 percent) live in married-couple families;
- More children than ever – 231,151 – live in single parent homes;
- More fathers are single parents than were twenty years ago, but still 8 in 10 single parents are female;
- Among African American children in Kentucky, almost two-thirds (64%) live in single parent households;
- Among white children, twenty-two percent live in single parent households;

- Over one half (54%) of births to unmarried women in Kentucky were to women ages 20-29.
- Younger teens (ages 15-17) represented 15 percent of births to unmarried mothers while older teens (ages 18 –19) represented 21 percent of unmarried births.

The book also provides county-by-county data on the cost of child care, education data, child poverty rates, the cost of living for a family of four, and children in the juvenile justice system who are living outside of their homes.

As is its tradition, the KIDS COUNT report looks at vital statistics data and trends for the state and each county. County trends in infant mortality, prenatal care, and teen birth rates are provided. The report also includes child abuse and neglect data.

The Kentucky KIDS COUNT report is prepared by a consortium of university researchers and child advocates under a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland and The National Council of Jewish Women, Louisville Section. The state project is part of a national effort in all fifty states to increase public awareness of the status of children and build public will for policy changes to improve children's lives.

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