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New Voices from the Bluegrass: A Portrait of Kentucky's Children in Immigrant Families

(Louisville, KY) Kentucky Youth Advocates, in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, released Kentucky's first statewide portrait of children in immigrant families. The report *New Voices from the Bluegrass: A Portrait of Kentucky Children in Immigrant Families* combines the most recent available U.S. Census Bureau data with immigrant youth and family voices from across the Commonwealth. Deputy Secretary for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) Tom Emberton Jr. states, "The timing of this report is important as the Cabinet is focusing on the complete family, the complete child, from education and health to economic well-being. We will use the data and best practices of this report as a tool for our work." The study offers a glimpse into the unique challenges, opportunities, and personal experiences that families in Kentucky face in regards to health care access, education, and community integration.

Although, the Commonwealth is the ninth fastest growing for the foreign-born population, the state's numbers remain much smaller than the national average. Children in immigrant families comprise a small number of Kentucky's total child population –

approximately 5 percent or 43,000 children. This number is growing at the same time that Kentucky's total child population is declining. Kentucky's economic future depends upon the successful integration of immigrant families. "Without immigration we would be in population decline. We as a state are aging and we need a young workforce to support systems like Medicare and Social Security. So, if I'm an old white person, I had better be paying attention to how immigrant children are doing," says Ron Crouch, Director of the Kentucky State Data Center, University of Louisville.

Findings in the report include:

- The majority of Kentucky's children in immigrant families, 68 percent, are U.S.-born citizens;
- Approximately 85 percent live in two-parent households;
- More than one-third are under the age of five;
- Approximately one in three children in immigrant families is white;
- Hispanic children represent another 32 percent;
- The fastest growing racial group of children in immigrant families is black, representing countries from Africa and the Caribbean.
- Kentucky's 11,000 English Language Learner students represent more than 95 languages.

Across the Commonwealth, conversations with immigrant youth and families convey pride and positive experiences in Kentucky. Superintendent Dale Brown of Warren County Public Schools asserts, "Our district is prepared to meet the needs of our English Language Learner students. This is an area we are continuing to grow in and we will do whatever is necessary to close any gaps. We are very pleased with the focus of

the teachers and staff in meeting the needs of our students. Many districts around the state are also taking positive steps.”

The report offers solutions for policymakers and community leaders in improving conditions for all children, specifically those in immigrant families. Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, suggests, “One of the real issues facing Kentucky’s lawmakers is whether we have the creativity and commitment as a Commonwealth to support all children. We clearly believe that the economic viability and quality of life for tomorrow’s Kentucky depends on today’s well-being of every Kentucky child regardless of their or their parents’ country of birth.”

Community leaders, public service providers, educators and immigrant youth and families identified practical solutions for strengthening Kentucky. “The need is growing. We need to focus on identifying families at risk, families with barriers such as economic or language access. Our Cabinet has established language access services, which have been utilized not just by Lexington and Louisville, but are being utilized in growing communities such as Bowling Green,” adds Tom Emberton Jr., Deputy Secretary of CHFS. The solutions offered include: establishing a statewide language access plan for meeting federal Title VI regulations, increasing cultural competency training and resources of healthcare providers, expanding eligibility and outreach to all people interested in pursuing a higher education, and developing legal paths to encourage responsible participation of the newest Kentuckians.

Access the full report and the Executive Summary (available in Spanish) at www.kyyouth.org.

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