



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY  
YOUTH  
ADVOCATES

**For Immediate Release**

December 13, 2007

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**Kentucky Ranks 5<sup>th</sup> Worse in Disparities between High and Low Income Children**  
Health Status for Low-Income Kids in Kentucky 48<sup>th</sup> in Nation

**Louisville, KY** – “We are operating a children’s health system of apartheid,” asserted Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA). Brooks was responding to a recent report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that examines the well-being of low-income and higher-income children separately in order to “illuminate how well states are doing in providing resources for the most vulnerable children.”

It finds that the top five states where low-income children rank much lower than higher-income children are Massachusetts, Connecticut, Ohio, North Carolina, and Kentucky. In other words, Kentucky is one of the worst in the nation in taking care of at-risk children.

“This report is a clear call that we as a state have to get serious about children in low-income families. For a state to allow the kind of differences between low and high income children is a political test for Kentucky to be sure – but more than that, it is a moral test for this state,” says Brooks.

The report finds that the best place to be low-income is in the upper Great Plains and Rocky Mountain regions. Utah, North Dakota, Idaho, Wyoming and South Dakota were the top five in well-being of children in low-income families. Some states even had substantially better rankings for the condition of their low-income children than their higher-income children, including New Mexico, Arizona, and Arkansas.

The report breaks all children into two groups: low-income and higher-income, based on whether their household is below or above 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The report uses data from the American Community Survey and the National Survey of Children’s Health to create six state-level indices of child well-being, including:

- health status;
- social and emotional well-being;

- cognitive development and educational attainment;
- family activities;
- family and neighborhood context; and
- social/economic characteristics.

States are also ranked according to each group. On a positive note, Kentucky's children in low-income families rank in the upper quartile for family activities (22<sup>nd</sup>) and family and neighborhood context (23<sup>rd</sup>), measured by things like being read to, eating meals with their family, and feeling safe in the neighborhood. Kentucky's children in low-income families also rank in the upper third for cognitive development (31<sup>st</sup>) and social/economic context (33<sup>rd</sup>), measured by things like learning disabilities, reading for pleasure, and living in a household with out a telephone or vehicle.

The bad news is that Kentucky's children in low-income families rank second to last (48<sup>th</sup>) in health status and social and emotional well-being. The health status rankings were based on the percentage of low-income children who have health problems, are overweight, have activity limitations or asthma, and the amount of physical activity they get. Social/emotional well-being is measured by the percentage of low-income children with emotional or behavioral difficulties, depression or anxiety, and problem behaviors.

"This report presents a real opportunity for Governor Beshear. If he can galvanize policy makers in Kentucky to focus more attention on serving health needs – both in terms of physical and emotional well-being – of low-income children, then Governor Beshear will introduce a new chapter for childhood in the Commonwealth," says Brooks.

"We only get one chance for a healthy and safe childhood," says Lacey McNary, Deputy Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "Kentucky's low-income children are in desperate need of leadership at the national level as well. President Bush's veto of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) reauthorization today was terrible news for Kentucky's children."

Child advocates across the state have some developed some concrete solutions to address these problems. Kentucky Youth Advocates joins dozens of partners in promoting a Blueprint for Kentucky's children. An important part of that effort centers on children's health imperatives which include:

- ***Expand access to the Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program (KCHIP)***
  - Implement 12 month continuous eligibility and presumptive eligibility for KCHIP families.
  - Eliminate the face-to-face interview requirement for enrollment and create an online application and renewal process.
- ***Improve Access to Dental Care Services for Children***
  - Implement a state funded loan forgiveness program for dental providers serving Kentucky's Medicaid and KCHIP population in underserved communities.

- Require public school students to receive a dental screening within 60 days of first-time enrollment.

Find out more about the Blueprint for Kentucky's children at [www.kyyouth.org](http://www.kyyouth.org).

Download a full copy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's report: [States Ranked on the Basis of Child Well-Being for Children in Low-Income Families](#).

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***Kentucky Youth Advocates** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*