



## NEWS RELEASE

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### WISCONSIN BACK AMONG TOP 10 STATES FOR KIDS ***KIDS COUNT 2003* Report Shows Good News Overall, A Few Red Flags**

Wisconsin ranks 10th overall among the states in children and family well-being according to *KIDS COUNT 2003*, a report released this week by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Published annually since 1991, *KIDS COUNT* provides state-by-state data on a variety of indicators including economic status, health, education and juvenile justice. Wisconsin's rank, based on data from 2000 and 2001, is an improvement over last year's report, which ranked the state 11<sup>th</sup> overall.

However, Wisconsin's rank has dropped from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> in the ten-year span between 1990 and 2000. Indicators on which the state lost ground over the decade include:

- Percentage of teens who are high school dropouts increased from 4 percent to 7 percent.
- Percentage of families headed by a single parent increased from 21 to 26 percent.
- Percentage of low-birthweight babies increased from 5.9 to 6.5 percent. (Some increase in low-birthweight babies can be attributed to the increase in multiple births, but there is still a high correlation between lack of adequate prenatal care and low birthweight.)
- Percentage of idle teens (those not attending school and not working) grew from 4 percent to 5 percent.

Throughout the 1990s, *KIDS COUNT* has been a steady reminder of the risks faced by low-income families. This year, *KIDS COUNT* focuses on the high cost of being poor, comparing Wisconsin's experience to that of other states.

Among the indicators in which Wisconsin scores well is percentage of children covered by health insurance. Wisconsin's rate, 94 percent, is substantially better than the 88 percent national figure.

(more)

“We have a great record of covering kids, and it’s something we should be proud of,” said Anne Arnesen, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “But this data is also an important reminder that the state ought not to roll back its commitment to BadgerCare and Medicaid in these tough budget times. If we do, we put our children’s health and lives at risk.”

Wisconsin has also done a better job of immunizing children than the nation as a whole: 84 percent versus 79 percent. Additionally, the median income for Wisconsin families with children, \$56,000, is higher than the national average, \$50,000.

Areas where Wisconsin needs to improve include low-income housing availability. According to the report, 60 percent of low-income households with children in 2001 paid over 30 percent of their income for housing.

“Affordable housing is clearly an area where Wisconsin needs to do some hard work,” said Arnesen. “There are communities all over our state where working parents face long commutes because they cannot afford to live near where they work. We must create better options.”

The report also showed that 44 percent of Wisconsin households who are eligible for food stamps are not receiving them. Food stamps are a largely federally funded benefit that assists low-income families in buying food.

“This is an abysmal indicator and shows us that poor families in the state are not accessing the federal benefits that are available to them,” said Arnesen. “It’s one that can be improved through better outreach and education.”

Arnesen noted that the report should not inspire complacency among policy makers.

“Wisconsin always looks good in state-by-state comparisons, but we know that some populations in the state, particularly minorities, are not sharing equally in that well-being,” Arnesen said. “The next step is to find ways to distribute these good results among ALL of Wisconsin’s kids.”

For more information and a copy of the report, go to: [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org).