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### **New Report Shows More Attention Needed for Moms and Babies** *Milwaukee Improving but Still Struggling*

**Madison** - A new online report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation once again confirms that despite encouraging trends, Milwaukee babies and mothers are at greater risk of adverse outcomes than children born in most other large American cities. According to this year's edition of *The Right Start for America's Newborns: City and State Trends*, the City of Milwaukee continues to rank below the national average on all eight indicators studied, while Wisconsin as a whole ranks above the national average in all but one of these indicators of child well being.

"While improvement in outcomes for babies in Milwaukee is certainly encouraging," said Charity Eleson, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. "Racial and economic disparity in Wisconsin remain persistent. Policy makers must find ways to close the opportunity gap that is putting Milwaukee kids at a disadvantage from the day they are born, and in many cases, even earlier."

All eight indicators used in the *Right Start* are significantly influenced by family income. According to the 2000 Census, 32 percent of Milwaukee children are poor, compared to only 11 percent statewide. For minority children in Milwaukee, the numbers are sobering. Forty-three percent of African American children and 33 percent of Hispanic children are living in families that are poor.

Certainly one-way to assure that conditions for families in Milwaukee continue to improve is to maintain and expand health care coverage for families. In Milwaukee, the use of Medical Assistance coverage has continued to increase over the past few years. Current state budget woes threaten to jeopardize access to needed health care resources for low-income families.

"The legislature and Governor need to take a hard look at these numbers before considering reductions to health services to the state's neediest moms and children" said Eleson, "Reducing the health resources to Wisconsin families will only cost us more tomorrow and our children pay the biggest price."

(More)

The report includes the following highlights and lowlights:

**Births to teens**– Teenage childbearing can negatively affect both child and mother. Babies born to adolescents are more likely to be born with low birth weights and to receive less cognitive stimulation than are babies born to adult women. Teen mothers are also half as likely to get timely prenatal care as adult mothers. Although the rate of births to teens in Milwaukee has improved over the decade; **Milwaukee ranks 49<sup>th</sup> of the 50 largest cities, with the second highest rate of births to teens.**

**Births to unmarried mothers** – Children born to unmarried mothers generally do not have access to the same economic and emotional resources that are available to children born to married women. In Milwaukee fully 60 percent of babies were born to unmarried mothers in 2002. **This is twice the state rate of 30 percent and significantly higher than the 50-city average of 44 percent.**

**Births to mothers with less than 12 years of education** – A mother's education level can affect many aspects of child well-being, including school readiness and the child's overall educational achievement. Children of more highly educated mothers are more likely to be read to daily by a family member. Reading to young children promotes language acquisition and literacy development crucial to success upon school entry. Less than half (42 percent) of all preschool aged children whose mothers have less than a high school diploma were read to daily by a family member, compared to 73 percent of preschoolers whose mothers were college graduates. **The percentage of births to mothers without a high school education in Wisconsin (16 percent) is well below the national average (22 percent). In Milwaukee, however, fully 36 percent of births are to women without 12 years of education.**

**Smoking** – Babies born to mothers that smoked during pregnancy are more likely to have health problems, including low birth weight, intrauterine growth, cognitive and developmental delays, infant mortality and a host of other negative consequences. **Although there has been great improvement, 15 percent of all births in Wisconsin in 2002 were to women who smoked. Nationally, that figure is 11 percent.**

**Prenatal care** – Women who receive timely prenatal care are less likely to have babies with health problems. According to Child Trends, failure to obtain early prenatal care may reflect a mother's indifference to her pregnancy, or it may reflect a lack of available health care. It may also reflect the fact that a woman is in a precarious situation where other resources are not available to her and her child. **In Wisconsin 97 percent of mothers received care in the first trimester of their pregnancy.**

**Low birth weight (less than 5.5 lbs)** – Babies that are born weighing less than 5.5 pounds have a good chance of experiencing developmental and health problems as they grow up. The number of babies born at low birth weight may be an indication of a group of children that will need additional assistance as they prepare for school. **The percent of babies born at low birth weight in Milwaukee in 2002 was 9.3 percent (the national 50-city average was 8.8 percent). For the state of Wisconsin, that rate was 6.6 percent.**

***The Right Start*** is a joint project of KIDS COUNT--an initiative of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, located in Baltimore, MD--and Child Trends, a Washington, DC-based research organization. The measures tracked in ***The Right Start*** are intended to provide policymakers, child advocates and others with data that reflect conditions prior to birth; a newborn's health status at birth; and maternal characteristics that are associated with a child's educational and social outcomes.

The report is available at [www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart2005](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart2005). The online format allows viewers to create custom reports such as state and city profiles, line graphs showing trends over time, color-coded U.S. maps, and ranking tables, all generated from ***The Right Start*** database.

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