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(Note: county specific data for your area are included with this release)

For more information contact:

Emily Schwartz

314.647.2003 ext 205

eschwartz@mokids.org

Scott Gee

314.647.2003 ext 201

sgee@mokids.org

**Annual KIDS COUNT Report Finds Needs of Missouri's Children Are Growing
*Poverty, Health, and the Need for Quality Education Are Highlighted***

May 11, 2009..... The *2008 KIDS COUNT in Missouri Data Book*, a publication of Citizens for Missouri's Children (CMC), confirms that children in the state are facing increasing challenges brought on by higher levels of poverty, a lack of affordable health care, and a lack of high-quality educational opportunities for all Missouri's children. The annual report, a collaborative project of CMC, the Children's Trust Fund, and more than 30 public and private organizations from across the state, documents the status of children in all 114 Missouri counties and the City of Saint Louis. The report covers areas such as health, education, financial security, juvenile justice, and child protection. This year, the Data Book is accompanied by an interactive Web tool that geographically displays county-by-county trends over the past five years; it can be found at www.mokids.org.

"By reviewing annually the status of Missouri's children, we hope to educate the public about whether our children have the resources and supports needed to develop into healthy, well-rounded adults," explained Scott Gee, CMC's executive director. "Together as a community we can work to develop policies to ensure that our state's children do count."

Improving Indicators

The KIDS COUNT report uses 10 primary indicators of child well-being to assess how children in the state are faring. Data from the 2008 Data Book show improvements in six indicators:

- Child abuse and neglect: Between 2003 and 2007, the rate decreased by 14.4 per 1,000 children.
- Violent teen deaths: Between the base years of 1998/2002 and the current period of 2003/2007, the rate decreased by 5.2 per 100,000 teens.

- Child deaths, ages 1–14: Between the base years of 1998/2002 and the current period of 2003/2007, the rate decreased by 2.0 per 100,000 children.
- Out-of-home placements: Between 2003 and 2007, the rate decreased by 1.0 per 1,000 children.
- Births to mothers without high school diplomas: Between 2003 and 2007, the rate decreased by 0.4%.
- Infant mortality: Between the base years of 1998/2002 and the current period of 2003/2007, the rate decreased by 0.2 per 1,000 live births.

“It is encouraging to see progress on these indicators,” said Gee. “At the same time, the incidence rates in each of these areas remain high, which underscores how much more work needs to be done.”

Declining Indicators

Four indicators showed declines in the latest data report:

- Students enrolled in free/reduced price lunch: Between 2003 and 2007, the rate increased by 2.5%.
- Births to teens: Between 2003 and 2007, the rate increased by 2.6 per 1,000 teen girls aged 15 to 19.
- Annual high school dropouts: Between 2003 and 2007, the rate increased by 0.3%.
- Low birth weight infants: Between the base years of 1998/2002 and the current period of 2003/2007, the rate increased by 0.3%.

“The percent of students enrolled in the free/reduced price lunch program is a strong indicator of a family’s poverty status,” added Gee. “We’ve also seen a 2.9% increase in the number of children receiving food stamps since 2003. As families struggle to make ends meet, it becomes harder for them to fulfill basic nutritional needs for their children, as well as to provide basic necessities such as health and dental care, quality child care and early education, and a safe and secure place to live.”

In recent years, CMC has focused advocacy efforts on the issue of children’s health care. “The 2008 Data Book indicates that between 2003 and 2007, the number of children participating in Missouri’s public health insurance program decreased by over 50,000,” noted Sherry Tucker, the chair of CMC’s Board of Directors. “Nearly 150,000 Missouri children currently lack health coverage, but approximately two-thirds of these children are eligible for public health coverage but not enrolled. Many of the declines that we are seeing, such as low birth weight infants, can be traced to this lack of access to adequate health care.”

County Rankings

The *KIDS COUNT in Missouri Data Book* includes a composite ranking for each county in the state and the City of Saint Louis. For the third year in a row, Saint Charles County, a Saint Louis suburb, was ranked as the state’s most kid-friendly area, based on a composite of all KIDS COUNT measures. Platte County, located just north of Kansas City, was second, followed by Atchison, Worth, and Nodaway Counties. The City of Saint Louis again ranked last in the composite rankings, with Dunklin, Pemiscot, McDonald, and Ripley Counties rounding out the

bottom five. The state's two largest counties, Saint Louis County and Jackson County, ranked 18th and 85th respectively.

The 2008 Data Book marks the publication of the 15th annual *KIDS COUNT in Missouri Data Book*. First produced in 1993, it is the state's most comprehensive compilation and analysis of data on child well-being.

The KIDS COUNT report can be found on CMC's Web site: www.mokids.org. The new KIDS COUNT data map, also found on CMC's Web site, allows users to directly compare their county with others in the state. This first-of-its-kind interactive map shows data on child well-being for every county in Missouri over the past five years. Data for the KIDS COUNT report is compiled from more than 80 federal, state, county, and municipal sources by the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis at the University of Missouri.

Citizens for Missouri's Children is Missouri's leading statewide child advocacy organization. The organization's mission is to advocate for the rights and well-being of all Missouri's children, especially those with greatest need.

Primary funding for the *2008 KIDS COUNT in Missouri Data Book* comes from the Children's Trust Fund, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation.

-30-

**Attachments: Executive Summary
Missouri/Minority Profile
County Pages
County Ranks**