

## High rates of child poverty continue to hamper further progress

SANTA FE — Several indicators of child well-being are showing improvement in New Mexico, but a persistently high rate of children living in poverty continues to cast a pall over the state. That is the overall conclusion in the 2017 New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book, released Jan. 16 by New Mexico Voices for Children at 10 am at the Roundhouse to coincide with the start of the legislative session.

The theme of this year's report is "At a Crossroads: Choosing the Path to Child Well-being in New Mexico" to reflect unprecedented changes at the federal level as well as the fact that this year New Mexico voters will elect a new governor because the current one is term-limited.

"The data book has always been an exercise in looking at where we stand in terms of child well-being," said Amber Wallin, who is deputy director of NM Voices and oversees the organization's KIDS COUNT program. "But this year we really wanted to emphasize that the state needs to be looking forward as well. There are proven policy solutions to our challenges, and the elections are a chance to demand that we treat our children better, to demand that policymakers fully commit to improving opportunities for our kids to thrive," she added.

The annual report takes a more in-depth look at the 16 indicators that are covered in the national KIDS COUNT Data Book, which is released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation every summer. The New Mexico report also includes data on additional indicators of child well-being, data by race and ethnicity, and data at the state, county, tribal, and school district levels. Along with data, the report presents policy recommendations in each area of child well-being.

“We really hope legislators will take the policy recommendations to heart, because they can make an extraordinary difference,” said James Jimenez, executive director of NM Voices. “We all know that children are our future. But so much of their future is determined by the investments we make in them today. We’re all in this together, and if, as a society, we fail to make those investments now we will all pay the price down the road,” he said.

Among the indicators showing improvement are: the percent of young children in school; reading proficiency; on-time graduation rates; and the teen birth rate.

Indicators showing decline include: the percent of children living in poverty; child and teen death rates; and single-parent families.

The 2017 New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book is available online at www.nmvoices.org/archives/9728.

Much more data on child well-being can be found at the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Data Center at http://datacenter.kidscount.org .

***New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico’s children, families and communities.***

New Mexico Voices for Children