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**DATA SHOW COLORADO WITH FASTEST GROWING RATE
OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY IN THE NATION**

**Range of Factors Contributes to 73 Percent Increase
in Poverty Rates Between 2000 and 2006**

Between 2000 and 2006, Colorado had a 73 percent increase in the number of children living in poverty, the highest rate of increase in the nation, according to a report released today by the Colorado Children's Campaign. According to the *2008 KidsCount in Colorado* report, about 180,000 children in Colorado were living in poverty in 2006, nearly 76,000 more children than were living in poverty in 2000. At the same time, the total number of children in the state increased only six percent.

"By a lot of different measures, poverty is the largest obstacle to opportunity for Colorado's kids and its impact can last a lifetime," said Megan Ferland, President of the Colorado Children's Campaign. "Kids growing up in poverty often struggle with educational, health, emotional and behavioral difficulties, and a range of other challenges that decrease their chances of success and often rob them of hope at an early age. This is a trend our children, and our state, cannot afford."

According to the report, U.S. Census Bureau estimates indicate that more than 180,000 of Colorado's children, or 15.7 percent, live below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as \$21,200 for a family of four in 2008. The state's number of children living in poverty is quickly approaching the national average of 18.3 percent. In addition, approximately 82,000 children in Colorado live in extreme poverty – which is 50 percent of FPL or \$7,000 per year for a single mom and her child. In fact, the percentage of children living in extreme poverty had a faster rate of growth (116 percent) than any other group of poor children in the state. The largest numbers of these children are under the age of five.

The *KidsCount in Colorado* report is an annual county-by-county, data-based compilation of a variety of factors impacting child well-being. The report is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which releases a national KidsCount report each year with state child well-being rankings.

The Children's Campaign also released an additional document today, "Childhood Poverty in Colorado," to provide greater detail on the poverty trend. According to that report, trends in several areas are affecting the overall poverty rate increase, including the number of children living in single-parent households; the availability of jobs paying a living wage for low-skilled workers; the changing demographics of the state; and the number of students who drop out of high school or do not acquire enough education to make a good living.

"While hope for simple explanations and solutions is understandable, the reality is the cause of Colorado's dramatic increase in the number of children living in poverty is complex," said Ferland.

Ferland spoke along with Governor Bill Ritter and Lieutenant Governor Barbara O'Brien today at the state capitol about the trend.

"As adults, we have an urgent obligation to ensure that poverty does not determine our children's future," said Governor Ritter. "Since taking office in January of 2007, I have worked to create and promote public policy that supports our children, especially those most at risk. Understanding that education is the key to bringing children out of poverty and creating a future filled with hope and promise, I am focused on cutting the high school dropout rate and achievement gap in half and doubling the number of college certificates and degrees awarded to Coloradans, over the next 10 years."

"Solid data tell us where we stand – now it is on all of us to move to where we want to be," said Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien. "That is why KidsCount is so important. It tells us, in real numbers, where we are succeeding and where we can do better for our children."

According to the reports released today, several neighboring states actually reduced the number of their children living in poverty between 2000 and 2006, while Colorado's rates consistently increased.

"What we know is that in Colorado, a complicated and restrictive set of constitutional and statutory limits on revenue and spending exacerbate the effects of poverty," said Ferland. "In 2006, per capita state expenditures in Colorado were nearly \$1,000 less than the national average, \$2,600 less than in New Mexico, and \$3,500 less than in Wyoming."

Other trends

Other child well-being trends in the *2008 KidsCount in Colorado* report:

- Colorado ranked last in the nation in children in poverty who were uninsured. With 37 percent of poor children uninsured in Colorado, the state's rate is nearly double the national average. Since 1999, Colorado's overall percentage of uninsured children continues to be higher than the U.S. rate as well, with 14 percent of children uninsured compared to 11 percent nationally.

- Since 2002, the statewide birthrate has gone down slightly, immunization rates for young children have increased, and cigarette smoking and drug use by Colorado teens has gone down slightly.
- In Colorado, 24.1 percent of kindergarten children attend full-day, publicly-funded programs in public schools, compared to 59 percent of kindergarteners nationally. Research shows that children in full-day kindergarten programs gain 12.8 percent more in reading assessments and 10.3 percent more in math assessments than children in half-day programs between fall and spring.
- In Colorado, the rates of child maltreatment have increased 43 percent since 2000. In 2006, 10,086 children in Colorado were victims of abuse or neglect and 60 percent were children under the age of 8. Of these, 24 children died.
- In 2006, Colorado's statewide high school graduation rate was reported by the Colorado Department of Education as 74.1 percent. Minority students and economically disadvantaged students graduate less frequently than non-minority students and their more affluent peers.

For copies of the reports and more information about children's issues, please visit www.coloradokids.org or call (303) 839-1580.

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The Colorado Children's Campaign works to create hope and opportunity in Colorado – more than one million children at a time. The Campaign is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization focusing on expanding access to quality health care, P-16 education and early childhood experiences. For more information, please visit www.coloradokids.org.