



For Immediate Release
January 22, 2003

Contact: Jennifer Eastland
601-355-4911

Mississippi's children missing the "right start"

Jackson, MS....According to an annual report on key birth indicators, Mississippi showed only slight increases and decreases from those of the last year's report. However, any gains the State made over the past decade were off set by the gains made by other states.

Based on data from calendar year 2000, the most recent year when data from all states and the District of Columbia is available, Mississippi ranked at or near the bottom on six of the eight birth indicators: total births to teens (51st); teen births to women who were already mothers (51st); total births to unmarried women (50th); total births to mothers with less than 12 years of education (46th); low-birth-weight births (50th); and pre-term births (50th).

On four of these six birth indicators, there was virtually no change in the State's position on the ranked lists of states, even though there were decreases in the percentages reported from 1990 to 2000. For example, the percent of total births to teens fell from 21.3 percent in 1990 to 18.8 percent in 2000; yet, the State was ranked 51st in both years.

"We can't expect other states to stand still while we work – and many, many people here are working very hard – to give our children a better start in life," said Jane Boykin, president of the Forum on Children and Families and project director for KIDS COUNT Mississippi. "I don't think we can worker harder; so, we're going to have to worker smarter if we're going to make a difference", she continued.

In two measures, the State made significant improvement and actually dropped in the ranked lists. The percent of total births to mothers receiving late or no prenatal care dropped from 4.8 percent, ranked 23rd, to 3.9 percent in 2000 and 33rd place on the ranked list.

Similarly, the percent to total births to mothers who smoked during pregnancy dropped from 15.8, 11th place in the 1990 rankings, to 12.3 in 2000 when the state ranked 21st on the listing of all states and the District of Columbia.

"We've got to use these data as a wake up call and commit ourselves to approaching problem solving differently. If it were a hopeless situation, other states wouldn't be making progress," Boykin said.

The Right Start for America's Newborns: A Decade of City and State Trends, is a joint project of Child Trends in Washington, DC, and KIDS COUNT, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, MD. The eight measures tracked are associated with a child's poor educational and social outcomes. The importance of this kind of data is demonstrated by the fact that the poverty rate for children born to an unmarried, teenage, high school dropout (79 percent) is 10 times that of children born to a married woman over age 20 who has finished high school.

The report is available on-line allowing viewers to create custom reports such as state profiles, line graphs showing trends over time, color-coded U.S. maps, and ranking tables from the data base. To view the report, click on *The Right Start for America's Newborns* at www.mfcf.org/kidscount.html

KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the U.S.

The Forum on Children and Families is a Jackson-based non-profit organization providing community resource development through information, education and training; and annually publishes the KIDS COUNT Mississippi Data Book tracking county-by-county data.

###