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New KIDS COUNT Mississippi Report Full of Surprises

Jackson, MS... While the annual update of KIDS COUNT data indicators reveals no surprises in the county-by-county report, the 2006 KIDS COUNT Mississippi Data Book presents an unexpected view of the State.

In the 25 years since the Census reported a drop of over 10 percent, there has been little change in the State's poverty rate. Poverty decreased from 35.4 percent in 1969 to 23.9 percent in 1979; but as recently as 2004, poverty in the State had only declined to a slightly lower 21.3 percent.

Poverty has become one of Mississippi's major industries and leading employers and, according to the report, created two states of Mississippi in the process. Jane Boykin, President of the Forum on Children and Families and project director for KIDS COUNT Mississippi called it a paradox of poverty.

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“When you consider the virtually unchanged poverty rate and all the federal money poverty generates for the State, you realize poverty is an economic force here, not just an economic indicator,” she continued.

Boykin believes the “poverty payroll” identified in the report has become so large that it’s the real barrier to economic opportunity in the State. “It certainly explains why efforts to reform the health, education, and social services available to low-income children and families seldom produce the intended outcome,” she said.

The relatively unchanged rate of poverty in the State over the past 25 years is not the only surprise in 2006 KIDS COUNT Mississippi Data Book, aptly titled The Two States of Mississippi. None are more surprising, however, than data revealing Claiborne County Mississippi has the nation’s largest percentage of preschool-age children enrolled in an early childhood education program.

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“That’s right,” Boykin said, “when all 3141 counties in the nation are ranked on this Census indicator, Claiborne County is number one on the list. We’ve been releasing data documenting the unusually large percentage of Mississippi children enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program for the past several years,” she continued, “so that didn’t surprise me as much as the related data that show only seven counties in the nation have a larger percentage of preschool age children with no parent employed.”

The report and related county-by-county data are available on-line at www.mfcf.org.

KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children.

KIDS COUNT Mississippi is an affiliated project operated by the Forum on Children and Families, www.mfcf.org, a Jackson-based non-profit organization providing community resource development through information, education and training.

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