



BUILDING BETTER LIVES

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**Rate of Illinois Youth in Custody Lower than U.S. Average,
According to National Report; Number of Incarcerated Youth Still Too High**
Child Poverty on the Rise, More Illinois Families Struggle with Housing Costs

CHICAGO – Although the rate of detained and committed youth in custody in Illinois was two times lower than the U.S. rate in 2006, far too many Illinois adolescents remain incarcerated, according to Voices for Illinois Children and the Juvenile Justice Initiative. The new statistics were released as part of the national 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Additionally, in 2006, the estimated daily count of detained and committed youth in the custody of juvenile facilities in Illinois was 2,631. Of these, 59 percent were in custody for non-violent offenses compared with 66 percent nationwide, according to the report.

“The good news is that Illinois has begun to find success in pursuing appropriate rehabilitation of young offenders through innovative alternatives to simple incarceration. The reality, however, is that too many of our youth are in state and county correctional facilities,” said Voices for Illinois Children President Jerry Stermer. “We must continue to search for new program models that are appropriate for all types of youth in the juvenile system. With effective interventions and policy and system reforms, we can produce better outcomes for young people.”

The 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides data on adolescents in the juvenile justice system, and its essay, “A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform,” discusses youth who are in the system and highlights new approaches to reform.

The Casey Foundation found that young people who penetrate the system deeply—those confined in correctional facilities—suffer some of the lowest odds of long-term success of any adolescent group. They will achieve less educationally, work less and for lower wages, fail more frequently to form enduring families, and experience more chronic health problems than other adolescents.

“Illinois has demonstrated success in reducing confinement in pilot projects like the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative in Cook County and Bloomington, and Redeploy Illinois in St. Clair County and the Second Judicial Circuit. These programs utilize evidence-based programming like Functional Family Therapy and Multi-Systemic Therapy in community settings, as well as alternatives like evening reporting centers, to deflect youth from confinement and provide more individualized and holistic services within the community.” said George Timberlake, Retired Chief Judge, Second Judicial District of Illinois. “This report encourages expansion of these successful pilot

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National KIDS COUNT Data Book 2008

Page 2

programs, to develop community-based alternatives and evidence-based practices throughout the state, especially for youth charged with non-violent offenses.”

Illinois passed the nation’s first law establishing a separate legal system for children and youth in 1899, and has been at the forefront of juvenile justice reform for decades. In the 1990s, the Casey Foundation brought the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) to Illinois, and Cook County has a model for the nation as a JDAI pilot site. In 2004, Illinois developed a pilot project, Redeploy Illinois, to decrease the number of youth in secure confinement. Two years later, the state created a new Department of Juvenile Justice—separate from the Department of Corrections—intended to focus more fully on the specific, rehabilitative needs of young offenders. Illinois also has been successful at reforming its transfer laws.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* also presents information and statistical trends on the needs and conditions of America’s most disadvantaged children and families.

Illinois children and their families continue to face challenging economic conditions as more children are living in poverty and more low-income families are struggling to keep up with housing costs.

Among the report’s findings:

- Child poverty: Seventeen percent of Illinois children live in poverty, up from 15 percent in 2000. Eight percent of children live in extreme poverty, while 36 percent live in low-income families.
- Economic security: Seventy-one percent of low-income families with children spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing in 2006, up from 65 percent in 2001.
- Child health: Ten percent of children lacked health insurance in 2005, compared with 11 percent in 2000.

But there is encouraging news: Fewer teens are dropping out of school, and the child death rate and teen birth rate continue to fall, according to the report.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* ranks Illinois 24th in the nation in children’s well-being, up from 26th in 2007 thanks to improvements in six of 10 key indicators, including the teen birth rate, child death rate, and the number of high school dropouts. Illinois has moved up significantly since 1994, when the state placed 39th for its quality of life for children.

“We know that sustained public investments matter,” Stermer said. “Children’s well-being has improved in Illinois. Yet, the data challenge us to come together around goals and public policies that will address persistent problems of poverty and lack of access to quality health care.”

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Voices for Illinois Children is a leader in advocating for kids and families. Our goal as a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization is to bring people together to help build better lives through public policies that support children, families and communities in Illinois.

The Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI) is a statewide advocacy coalition to transform the juvenile justice system. The JJI advocates to reduce reliance on detention, to enhance fairness for all youth and to develop adequate community based resources throughout the state.