National Data Snapshot Finds Inconsistent Improvements in Arizona Children Living in Poor Neighborhoods

PHOENIX, AZ — A new five-year data snapshot from the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds that concentrated poverty among children dropped slightly in Arizona, but that one in five (20%) still lives in poor neighborhoods, with children of color and children in rural Arizona far more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty.

“Children Living in High Poverty, Low-Opportunity Neighborhoods,” a KIDS COUNT® data analysis, used U.S. Census data from the years 2012-2017 to look at concentrated poverty (neighborhoods where 30% or more of the population lives below the federal poverty level) and examines economic trends over that period.

The study found Latino children nationwide are five times more likely than their white counterparts to live in poor neighborhoods, while African American and American Indian children are seven times more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty than white children. This is especially evident in Arizona, where 61% of American Indian kids are living in concentrated poverty. Arizona alone is home to more than a quarter (28%) of the national total of American Indian children living in high-poverty neighborhoods. Additionally, the report found Arizona has the highest percentage of rural children living in concentrated poverty (39% vs. 11% nationally), New Mexico is second at 30%.

Among all children living in concentrated poverty in Arizona, the percentage dropped from 22% to 20% over the five-year period ending in 2017.

“The risks for children who experience poverty when they are young are far too great. We have to do more to break the cycle of poverty and help struggling families improve their situation, particularly in communities of color and in rural Arizona,” said Siman Qaasim, president and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance. “Access to good jobs and services – such as affordable child care and assistance with food and housing – can make a difference when a family is fighting to catch up or get ahead.”

Growing up in a poor neighborhood poses a great risk to child development: many children often lack access to healthy food and quality medical care, and often face greater exposure to environmental hazards, such as poor air quality and toxins such as lead, from older homes and infrastructure. Financial hardships and fear of violence can cause chronic stress linked to numerous health problems – all of which can have a dramatic impact on children that lasts through adulthood. Kids growing up in these conditions have a more difficult time breaking the cycle of poverty as adults and have less earning potential later in life.

Other key findings from the five-year study for Arizona include:

Children’s Action Alliance is an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works to improve children’s health, education, and security through information and action. Visit us online at www.azchildren.org.
• Progress was slower for children of color. American Indian children are more than **ten times more likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods areas than their white peers.** African American and multi-racial children saw increases in the number and percentage of children living in high concentrated poverty areas.
• Children living in immigrant families in Arizona are twice as likely to live in poor neighborhoods (31%), compared to nonimmigrant families (15%). Nationally, the statistic is 15%.

Children’s Action Alliance joins the Casey Foundation in calling on national, state and local stakeholders to act now to help families lift themselves out of these circumstances. Policies at the community, county and state level that engage, involve, strengthen and support families and have a significant impact on the lives of children include:

• Access to high quality and affordable child care for families so parents can work or further their education and ensure children are in a safe, early learning environment.
• Access to affordable health coverage for families so kids can grow up healthy and be better equipped to learn.
• Good schools in every neighborhood, regardless of zip code, that give children an opportunity to get a solid education and be prepared to compete for well-paying jobs of the future.
• Support for families who need assistance with food, housing, job training, counseling and other services.

About Children’s Action Alliance
Children’s Action Alliance is an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works to improve children’s health, education, and security through information and action. Visit us online at www.azchildren.org.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation
The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.