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As childhood poverty rate continues to climb, fewer families able to access safety-net

TOPEKA – There's little evidence of economic recovery post-recession among low- and moderate-income Kansas families with children. According to the 2013 Kansas KIDS COUNT report, nearly one in four Kansas children is living in poverty.

The report, issued today by Kansas Action for Children, shows the child poverty rate has reached 23.15 percent, up from 18.11 percent five years ago.

At the same time, fewer families are gaining access to supports like the Temporary Assistance for Families (TAF) Program and the Kansas Child Care Assistance Program.

"Many Kansas families haven't yet rebounded from the recession. These are working parents who aren't able to earn enough to make ends meet – they need these programs to help them feed their children and keep them healthy and safe," said Shannon Cotsoradis, president and CEO of Kansas Action for Children. "And yet the Department of Children and Families continues to make administrative changes without legislative oversight or consideration for the impact on families. It's time to reverse course."

In 2011, the average monthly enrollment in TAF was 25,981. In 2012, that number dropped to 21,574. For child care assistance, the average monthly enrollment was 19,735 in 2011 and declined to 17,684 in 2012.

"The greatest threat to the well-being of children is a lack of economic security," said Cotsoradis. "Making it more difficult to access safety-net programs only hurts our chances of reducing poverty."

Kansas Action for Children's annual KIDS COUNT report measures county-by-county how kids are doing across more than 20 indicators of health, education and economic success.

This year, there are positive data trends in several health indicators:

- The infant mortality rate has declined to 6.07 (per 1,000 live births).
- The on-time immunization rate has held steady at 72 percent.
- The teen violent death rate is down to 29.8 (per 100,000 teens).

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But Kansas still has room for improvement in other areas:

- There are only 43.1 slots available in Head Start programs for every 100 eligible children.
- 49.51 percent of Kansas schoolchildren receive free or reduced price lunch (2013), an increase from 42.69 percent in 2009.
- Despite some progress, only 49.55 percent of elementary schools offer pre-kindergarten or a 4-year-old at-risk program.

KIDS COUNT data is available for every Kansas county. To download your county's fact sheet, visit www.kac.org/kidscount.

For additional information, the online KIDS COUNT Data Center contains hundreds of measures of child well-being and allows users to create maps and graphs of the data at the national, state and county levels. Visit <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/ks>.

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