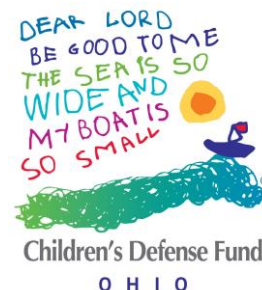


For Immediate Release

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LITTLE IMPROVEMENT SEEN IN 15 YEARS FOR CHILDREN IN OHIO'S APPALACHIAN REGION

COLUMBUS, Ohio, May 4, 2016 – Fifteen years after publication of a ground-breaking report on child well-being in Ohio's Appalachian region, a new report concludes there has been too little improvement and the region's 450,000 children must be a priority now.

The latest report by the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio), "[Ohio's Appalachian Children at a Crossroads: A Roadmap for Action](#)," finds some positive change, but overall paints a picture of stark contrast in the well-being of the Appalachian children compared to those in the rest of the state and much of the nation. Many health problems actually have worsened or newly emerged since the first report in 2001, and the percentage of children living in poverty in the region has increased.

"The well-being and future of Appalachia's children is at a crossroads," CDF-Ohio Executive Director Renuka Mayadev says. "Children are the future of Appalachian Ohio. We need to act now to ensure that they grow and develop into productive adults who will be our future community and business leaders, workers, teachers, health care providers and parents."

Thirty-two of Ohio's 88 counties are located in an area that follows the Appalachian Mountains, mainly up the eastern border of the state. Much of the region is rural and quite remote and there is a significant lack of public transportation. There is little ethnic diversity, with Whites comprising 92 percent of the child population.

In assessing the current state of the region, CDF-Ohio found the top 12 Ohio counties with the highest rates of child poverty are all located within Appalachia and that the economic recovery from the Great Recession of 2008 "has been slow to reverse the negative effects on children."

"Looking back over the past 15 years, we find that in Appalachia a higher percent of children are poor, unemployment is higher, median incomes continue to lag behind the

state average and working families are struggling to make a living wage,” the report states, adding more than a quarter of all kids live in households without enough food.

As serious as is the problem of poverty, however, the report put a special spotlight on some startling, seemingly intractable health problems:

- A higher percentage of babies are being born at low birthweight, putting them at increased risk of development problems and dying within the first year of life.
- There has been an “alarming” increase in the number of babies born drug-exposed due to the opiate epidemic. Babies born in Ohio’s Appalachia “are almost twice as likely as the average Ohio newborn to be diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome” at a rate of 15.4 babies per 1,000 births. Counties such as Scioto have rates as high as 76 babies per 1,000 births.
- In 2015, 28 Appalachian counties were formally designated as suffering an acute shortage of dentists, more than double the number in 2001. Twenty-one counties face an acute shortage of primary care physicians, and 28 counties have an acute shortage of mental health professionals.

When it comes to education, the region also faces significant challenges. Fourteen of the 32 Appalachian counties have no Early Head Start program and with 146,121 children under age 6 in the region, “for every Early Childhood Education space available, there are 3.8 children to serve.” Although they graduate at the same rate as other Ohio students, Appalachian students are more likely to need to take remedial “make-up” classes in college. Fewer adults have college degrees, in part because those with degrees move away for better opportunities.

Reinforcing its call for action, CDF-Ohio suggested “actionable recommendations” in each area of need, arguing a coordinated partnership of leaders and organizations in each community could reverse the slide in child well-being.

Summer food programs in every Appalachian county can reduce hunger and food insecurity; smoking cessation programs can reduce infant mortality, and integrating community health workers into health care systems can make health care more effective and accessible, the organization said. Reimbursement rates should be increased to make the business of providing early care and childhood education financially sustainable, and steps can and should be taken to attract more philanthropic dollars to the region.

“To accomplish these goals, businesses, policymakers, community groups, educators, faith leaders and families must unite and work together as partners in creating change for children,” Mayadev says. “The region needs to be ready with an educated, healthy workforce and the time is now to invest in the children of Appalachia so that they are prepared to lead the region as adults.”

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The Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.