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**Toward a Better Understanding of How Program Investments Provide
Stability for Families and Hope for Children**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report today highlighting the importance of making policy decisions based on good data about how various program investments benefit families and children living in poverty. The KIDS COUNT[®] Data Snapshot, [*Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States*](#), highlights the differences in measuring poverty by comparing the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) developed by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011 with the federal government's official poverty measure that was developed in the 1960's.

The Supplemental Poverty Measure takes into account both cash (for example Unemployment Insurance, Workers Compensation, Supplemental Social Security, Earned Income Tax Credits, etc.) and non-cash supports, or what are called "transfers" (for example Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, Free/Reduced Lunch, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, etc.). For Wisconsin, using the SPM means that approximately one in seven children live in poverty, compared to almost one in five based on the official measure (which measures income alone).

"The point of this lower rate is not to celebrate that by this measure fewer children live in poverty in our state. The point is to understand how important these programs are to reducing the harmful impacts of poverty on our children," said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. He added, "We need to ensure that our policy decisions take into account the reality that children would face without these programs. It is also important for the public to understand that there are government programs that are effective in reducing poverty."

Our understanding of the impacts of these programs on children in Wisconsin benefits greatly from the work of the University of Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP). IRP has developed a state-specific Wisconsin Poverty Measure (WPM) based on the SPM, and their 2014 [*Wisconsin Poverty Report*](#) provides more detailed insight into how programs in Wisconsin are supporting our children and families. Lonnie Berger, Director of IRP, said "If we truly want to understand the impact of social policies on poverty, it is crucial to utilize poverty measures that account not only for market income and cash transfers, but also taxes and tax credits, and the value of other types of benefits, such as SNAP. It is great to see such an approach included in KIDS COUNT[®], and gaining traction in poverty discussions more generally."

Unfortunately, sharp disparities remain between white children and non- white children that need to be addressed. “We want families to become independent and self-sufficient,” added Taylor, “and we must work together to ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow up in a safe and healthy family and community.”

Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States will be available at 12:01 EST on February 25 at www.aecf.org.

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The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), www.wccf.org is a multi-issue policy research and advocacy organization promoting statewide policies that promote a safe and health future for all children in Wisconsin. WCCF is a member of the KIDS COUNT® network sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation www.aecf.org.

The Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) is a center for interdisciplinary research into the causes and consequences of poverty and social inequality in the United States. It is nonprofit and nonpartisan. It is based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As one of three [National Poverty Research Centers](#) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, it has a particular interest in poverty and family welfare in Wisconsin as well as the nation.