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Southern Business Leadership Council Formed to Help Address Needs of Low-Income Children and Families in the South

Regional Business Effort for Children in the South Responds to High Rates of Child Poverty, Infant Mortality, and Uninsured Children

ATLANTA, GA - Because Southern states lead the nation with high rates of child poverty, uninsured children and infant deaths and disabilities, leaders from across the South today formed the Southern Business Leadership Council*. This Southern regional business leadership group will promote strategies to address the health, social, educational and economic conditions that place children and families at risk.

The Council, under the auspices of the Southern Institute on Children and Families, will focus special attention on enhancing the employability of low-income parents and their access to affordable child care, adequate health coverage and reliable transportation. An overarching goal of the Council will be to compile information and develop strategies to engage the southern business community in local, state, regional and national efforts to improve opportunities for children in the South. It will help businesses educate their employees about the advantages of health care coverage for children and options their children may have through Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Richard Riley, former Governor of South Carolina and former U.S. Secretary of Education is a member of the Council. "I'm pleased that corporate leadership is emerging in the South to address some of the most difficult problems our kids face," said Riley. "The Southern Business Leadership Council will work to enable low-income working families to meet the basic needs of their children, enhancing the stability and capacity of the southern workforce."

The private sector has found mutual benefit in investing in programs that support working families in the South. For example, Bank of America's Child Care Plus program pays up to \$152 a month per child under 5 years of age and up to \$175 per month per child ages 5 through 12 to assist qualifying employees with the cost of child care. Also, several states are collaborating with businesses to pool funds that can be matched for child care subsidies for low-income parents, while other states are educating businesses about the need to support quality child care. Four southern states actually provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

(more)

**List of Council Members is attached*

"I'm proud that the Bank of America Child Care Plus program has made a difference in the lives of our associates," says Paula Fraher, Director of National Initiatives for the Bank of America Foundation and a Council member. "The program has been so successful that we have expanded this terrific benefit to thousands of additional working parents."

To illustrate the conditions of southern children, the Southern Institute released a new chartbook, which uses leading economic, health, child care and education indicators to compare the health and well being of children in the South to that of children across the U.S. The document, *Chartbook of Major Indicators: Conditions Placing Children in the South at Risk*, paints a stark picture of the lives of children in 17 southern states and the District of Columbia. Nearly 41 percent of all uninsured children in the United States live in the South, and 42 percent of all infant deaths were reported in the South, according to the chartbook. In 2000, women in the South gave birth to more than 130,000 low birthweight babies, which is double the rate for other regions of the country. Median household income in the South is nearly \$3,700 less than the national median income.

Data on child care are equally dismal for families living in the South, where states are funded to serve only 15 percent of children eligible for state-federal child care subsidy programs. School dropout rates among children ages 16-19 in most southern states are above the national median of 9 percent.

"Children in the South pay an extremely high price for our region's failure to resolve longstanding health, economic and social problems. While some progress has been made, we must do more to build better lives for our young people. The Southern Business Leadership Council is an essential step in building a more aggressive approach to prevent or alleviate conditions that place children at risk," said Shuptrine.

This chartbook is part of the Southern Institute's ongoing presentation of indicators that reflect conditions placing children in the South at risk. More information on the Southern Business Leadership Council or the chartbook is available at www.kidsouth.org or by calling Bethanne Fox at 301-652-1558.

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is an independent, non-profit public policy organization founded in 1990 whose goal is to improve opportunities for children and families in the South, with a focus on disadvantaged children.

The southern states included in the work of the Southern Institute on Children and Families are:

Alabama	Kentucky	Oklahoma
Arkansas	Louisiana	South Carolina
Delaware	Maryland	Tennessee
District of Columbia	Mississippi	Texas
Florida	Missouri	Virginia
Georgia	North Carolina	West Virginia

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