



**For release at noon ET, Aug. 24**

**Contact:**

Beth Shine  
Southern Institute on Children and Families  
[bshine@thesoutherninstitute.org](mailto:bshine@thesoutherninstitute.org)  
(803) 319-3919

Jamie Schaff  
Hayslett Group  
[jschaff@hayslettgroup.com](mailto:jschaff@hayslettgroup.com)  
(770) 522-8855

## **Child, Family Indicators Show South Still Lags Behind Other Regions**

### *Former Education Secretary Calls for Business Leadership*

**ATLANTA, Aug. 24, 2004** – Children in the South continue to suffer from poverty, child abuse and poor educational performance at a rate significantly worse than other regions, according to a new compendium of research unveiled Tuesday.

Some 5.2 million Southern children are growing up poor, and Southern children are also more likely to die from abuse and neglect, lack basic reading skills or lack child health coverage, child care, according to the *2004 Chartbook of Major Indicators: Conditions Placing Children in the South At Risk*. The report was released by the Southern Institute on Children and Families during a meeting of the affiliated Southern Business Leadership Council.

“The South continues to be challenged by some of the nation’s most difficult and entrenched economic, health and social problems,” said former U.S. Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, chairman of the SBLC. “For the South to lag behind other regions of the country in child and family well-being is disheartening.”

“Although we, in the South, have done some good things, we still have such a long way to go. When children in the South fail to thrive, it has negative implications for the Southern region’s economy and quality of life.”

Data in the 2004 Chartbook focuses on five key indicators of child and family well-being. Examples include:

- **Economic Status:** Eleven Southern states and Washington D.C. had a higher percentage of children under 18 living in poverty than the nation as a whole.
- **Child Care:** Between the 2001 and 2003 fiscal years, eight Southern states decreased the number of children receiving subsidized child care.



- **Child Abuse and Neglect:** In 2002 approximately 700 child fatalities due to abuse or neglect occurred in the Southern region. Ten Southern states and Washington exceeded the U.S. rate for child fatalities due to abuse or neglect.
- **Education:** The percent of students in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade with below-basic reading scores is higher in nine Southern states and Washington than in the United States.
- **Health Coverage:** Approximately 2.6 million Southern children in lower-income families (at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, or \$37,700 annual income for a family of four) are uninsured.

“When children in the South fail to thrive, it has negative implications for the southern region’s economy and quality of life,” said Riley, who also served as governor of South Carolina prior to serving in the Clinton administration. “These longstanding issues will not be resolved without significant leadership. The business community can and should lead the call to action.”

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is an independent, non-profit organization that improves the well-being of children and families through knowledge, leadership and action. The *2004 Chartbook* presents a grim image of living conditions for lower-income children and families in the South – a region that comprises approximately 38 percent of the nation’s population.

“The *2004 Chartbook* should be an awakening to public- and private-sector leaders in the South,” said Sarah Shuptrine, president and chief executive officer of the Southern Institute. “Our region has a long way to go to improving education, health and economic opportunities for our children and families.

“If the Southern region is going to be a region of opportunity for all our citizens – and if we are going to stop the drain of resources that accompanies high rates of child abuse and neglect, limited health opportunities due to lack of health coverage, high rates of students who fall below basic reading scores, and lack of access to quality, affordable child care – we must have leadership.”

Speakers at a news conference for the release of the Chartbook Tuesday included Kevin Sass, Southern Business Leadership Council member and vice president of professional services for Columbus Regional Healthcare System in Columbus, Ga.

“Taking action to provide affordable child health coverage, so that no child is denied preventive and primary care because their family cannot afford to pay for it, is central to



reducing unnecessary health care costs associated with lack of access to such health services,” Sass said.

The Southern Institute compiles information and develops strategies to engage the Southern business community in local, state, regional and national efforts to improve opportunities for children in the South. The involvement of business leaders around the issues presented in the *2004 Chartbook* elevates the goal of improving the well-being of children and establishes a strong connection to the strategic economic growth and development of the Southern region.

The Southern Institute established the Southern Business Leadership Council in 2002 to facilitate business involvement and leadership in addressing issues that restrict opportunities for lower-income children and families in the South.

Identifying and implementing strategies to improve the productivity and stability of the lower-income workforce is a special focus for the Southern Business Leadership Council. The work of the SBLC will foster a deeper understanding and joint purpose in achieving public and private actions to better support today’s workforce of lower-income parents and enhance the potential of tomorrow’s workforce through expanded opportunities for child development.

SICF educates through research of policies, systems and practices, and generates greater awareness and equips community and business leaders and policymakers with knowledge to make informed decisions. The Southern Institute on Children and Families is funded through grants and contributions, and directs national programs consistent with its mission.

The states included in the work of the Southern Institute on Children and Families are: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

To learn more about the Southern Institute, the Southern Business Leadership Council or to access an electronic version of the *2004 Chartbook*, visit [www.thesoutherninstitute.org](http://www.thesoutherninstitute.org).

###