



To ensure the well-being of **Alabama's children** through research, public awareness, and advocacy.



# 2017 ANNUAL REPORT



[www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org)





OUR MISSION THROUGH  
**RESEARCH, PUBLIC AWARENESS,  
AND ADVOCACY**



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**Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW**  
Executive Director  
VOICES for Alabama's Children

Supporters like you made it possible for us to positively impact the lives of children in Alabama.

- Introducing the Child Care Safety Act and while it didn't pass, it elevated the conversation around Alabama's dual system of child care that puts the health and safety of children at risk.
- Securing an additional \$13 million increase in funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program.
- Bringing healthy foods closer to home by securing \$300,000 for the state's Healthy Food Financing Program. This benefits Alabamians living in communities with limited access to fresh, healthy foods.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**2017 marked a milestone year as we celebrated 25 years of working to improve child well-being. We thank you for your support knowing we could not have made this journey without you. Thanks to you, VOICES legacy will continue and Alabama's children will be better because you cared. Our sincere thanks to each one of you.**

On behalf of VOICES for Alabama's Children, I extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to our donors, organizational partners and advocates for your support and commitment in 2017. It was a banner year as we celebrated 25 years of advocating for Alabama's children. Over the last 25 years, among other legislative victories, VOICES for Alabama's Children along with our grassroots advocates and our corporate and philanthropic partners have led the way for the establishment of a Statewide Child Death Review Process resulting in a **23 percent decline in preventable child deaths**, passage of the Graduated Teen Driver's licensing law which contributed to a **29 percent decrease in teen deaths** following implementation, passage of the Child Passenger Safety law which **further reduced preventable child deaths by 23 percent**, and passage of a revised juvenile code that **reduced by 64 percent** the number of low-risk, non-violent youth being incarcerated by the Department of Youth Services.

As we have traveled around the state we were honored to meet you, train with you, share with you and work with you. We know that without you we could not do the work we do or make the impact we have made to improve the well-being of Alabama's children.

Our children of today will become our workforce of tomorrow. How we protect them speaks volumes about where we are as a state and more importantly where we are headed. Thank you for trusting us to be the voice for children since 1992. We look forward to continuing the fight with your support and partnership over the next 25 years.

Yours in advocacy,

**Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW**  
Executive Director

# HOW WE APPROACH RESEARCH

VOICES for Alabama's Children was the first, and remains the only, statewide child advocacy organization to research and document the conditions of children in each of Alabama's 67 counties through the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*.

For nearly 25 years, we have worked in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to publish the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*. It serves as the most trusted source of research on child well-being for nonprofits, government agencies and other organizations in Alabama – allowing them to make well-informed policy and programming decisions. Serving as both a benchmark and road map for how children are faring, the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* is used to raise visibility of children's issues, identify areas of need, set priorities in child well-being and inform decision-making at the state and local levels.

## Making Kids Count Through Research

We are committed to ensuring that every need of children in Alabama counts when important policy decisions are being made. Our *2017 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* allowed us to measure our successes and areas of improvement for the well-being of Alabama's children. The *Data Book* allows us to set and define our advocacy efforts and resources.

The *Data Book* is the foundation for child advocacy efforts across the state. Local and state decision makers, grassroots advocates, organizations and media outlets rely on the *Data Book* to accurately depict the needs and possible solutions for Alabama's children.

The *2017 Data Book* uses four well-being domains—health, education, safety and economic security. In 2017, we offered more disaggregated data by race/ethnicity and income level. State and county data profiles, made available online through VOICES for Alabama's Children's website and data uploaded to the national KIDS COUNT Data Center, provide unprecedented access to historical data from every county in Alabama.

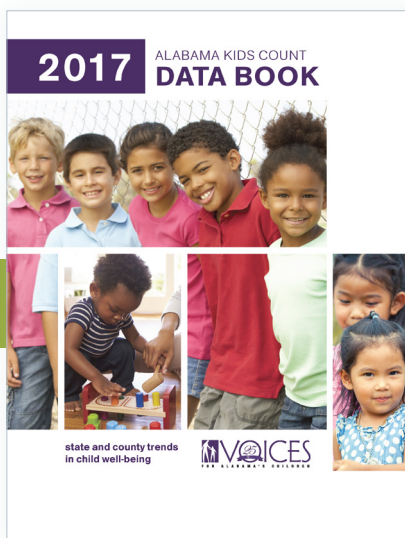
The *Data Book* served as the framework for the success and work we have accomplished over the past year. Through the *Data Book*, we were able to observe some significant successes in health care with 96 percent of all children in Alabama having some type of health coverage. However, the *Data Book* also revealed our state's health care network relies heavily on Medicaid.

Barbour 45.3%  
Coffee 26.4%  
Dale 26.2%  
Geneva 40.2%  
Henry 20.6%  
Houston 29.9%  
Pike 30.3%  
Alabama 27.3%



## OUR IMPACT:

- Partnered with Children's of Alabama to provide more than 200 copies of the *2017 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* to members of the Alabama Legislature, state agency heads, agency administrators and local elected officials.
- In 2017, VOICES conducted and participated in 65 presentations or events reaching 7,000 people. Of those, 763 took action by signing petitions, letters of support or signing up for VOICES CAN.



| 2017 ALABAMA KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK |         |        |           |        |          |         |       |        |       |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|----------|---------|-------|--------|-------|
| State                             | County  | Health | Education | Safety | Economic | Overall | Rank  | Change | Notes |
| Alabama                           | Barbour | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Coffee  | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Dale    | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Geneva  | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Henry   | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Houston | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Pike    | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |
| Alabama                           | Alabama | 45.3%  | 26.4%     | 26.2%  | 40.2%    | 20.6%   | 29.9% | 30.3%  | 27.3% |

## "Why I Use Kids Count"

### At the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, we use the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*

to help us describe the sociodemographic characteristics as well as the health and educational outcomes/challenges by county when writing federal grants. The data is also used to develop a needs assessment and program design. In addition, when determining funding for new Alabama First Class Pre-K grants, the data is used to establish population denominators for young children by county to understand the percentage of young children served by our programs. This supports increased service availability over time and identification of focus areas for future growth when funding allows.

— **Tracye Strichik, Ph.D.**, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

# HOW WE APPROACH PUBLIC AWARENESS

Research is the critical foundation for building a case for any needed program or policy, but research alone does not inspire change. Public awareness is key in building public will and support for change. In order to build political will to create, strengthen and otherwise improve policies affecting children and families, VOICES for Alabama's Children works to implement strategic communications strategies that balance messages, media and audiences.

Throughout the years, VOICES for Alabama's Children has built, and continues to build, a solid foundation of public awareness through nurturing existing relationships with print and electronic media, as well as building new ones.

VOICES for Alabama's Children also uses social media extensively to create awareness around key children's issues. Through targeted social media campaigns, action alerts and newsletters we are able to successfully influence the conversation around children's issues by reaching thousands of advocates from across the state to publicize our messages.

All of our public awareness efforts help build understanding and support for changes needed in our state to improve child well-being and with it the vitality of our state as a whole.

## OUR IMPACT:

- VOICES core priorities were mentioned over 307 times in print media, television news, or online media, which was seen by approximately 93,650,192 people in Alabama and beyond.
- The *2017 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* was mentioned in the media 42 times, which was seen by approximately 5,581,963 people in Alabama and beyond.
- In 2017, VOICES for Alabama's Children was mentioned over 162 times in the media.
- Healthy Food Financing was mentioned in the media 27 times.
- Alabama's First Class Pre-K was mentioned in the media 30 times in 2017.
- The issue of child care licensing in Alabama was mentioned 117 times in the media in 2017.
- In 2017, VOICES gained 1,705 new Twitter followers.
- VOICES has 2,754 followers on Facebook. Our posts were seen 649,292 times and engaged with 33,339 times.
- VOICES for Alabama's Children's staff collaborated and served on more than 37 national and statewide boards, coalitions and councils throughout the year.





# HOW WE APPROACH ADVOCACY

Lifting up the voice of children to promote sound policy decisions is the heart and soul of what we do. Research and public awareness directly correlate with the core of our efforts—advocacy. At VOICES for Alabama's Children, we advance research-backed policy solutions to give our children the Alabama they deserve.

In 2017, we continued our focus on grassroots advocacy by educating and training more than 300 advocates dedicated to improving child well-being in the state who made an impact by generating direct contacts with lawmakers. Our advocates engaged in more than 40,000 online and offline actions on potentially life changing bills for children and their families.

This year was also our Fourth Annual Child Advocacy Day. More than 200 advocates, business leaders, educators, parents and children joined forces with us urging lawmakers to keep children's issues a top priority in Alabama.

## Investing in Pre-K

For 11 consecutive years, Alabama's First Class Pre-K program has been nationally recognized as the top program in the country for quality. Access to First Class Pre-K has increased from 25 percent during the 2016-2017 school year, to 28 percent during the 2017-2018 school year. VOICES for Alabama's Children, as part of the Pre-K Task Force, is working to ensure all four-year-olds have access.

Because of the 1,441 pre-K and parent pre-K advocates, lawmakers again increased state investments for Alabama's First Class Pre-K program by \$13 million!

## Uniform Licensing and Inspection for All

Roughly 60,000 children are born in Alabama each year, the majority of whom will experience nonparental care before entering kindergarten.

During the third week of the 2017 Regular Legislative Session, VOICES for Alabama's Children partnered with 35 legislative champions from both sides of the aisle in both chambers to introduce landmark legislation.

In a historic effort HB277- The Child Care Safety Act, passed unanimously out of the House Children and Senior Advocacy Committee and on April 20th, members of the House

overwhelmingly passed a substitute version of HB277 by a vote of 88-9. HB277 went on to pass unanimously out of the Senate Judiciary Committee. But, in the final days of the session after two failed attempts for a vote on the Senate floor, the doors closed on this much needed win for children.

## Bringing Healthy Foods Closer to Home

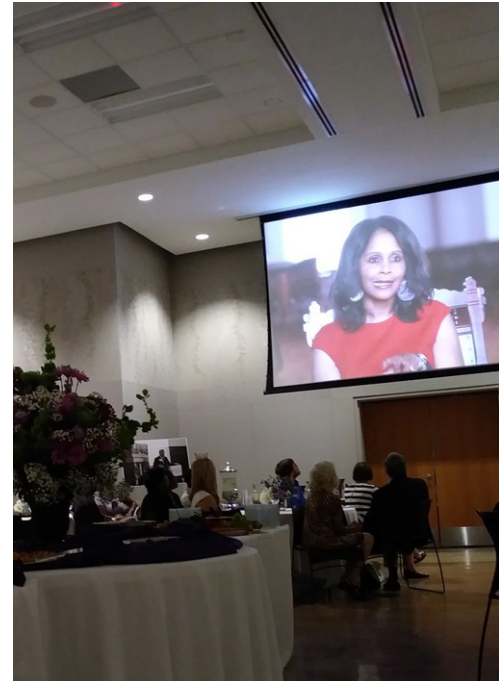
Approximately 1.8 million Alabamians, including nearly half a million children, live in areas with limited or no access to fresh, healthy food. Our research showed that a lack of access to healthy food impacts the overall health and life expectancy of residents living in low access communities. A statewide public opinion poll found overwhelming support from Alabama voters to address healthy food access. Eighty percent support the state incentivizing food retail businesses to locate in communities with limited access to healthy foods. In 2017, lawmakers passed a budget that included \$300,000 for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. The last quarter of the year, ADECA accepted applications for this funding.

## OUR IMPACT:

- In 2017, VOICES advocates sent 37,455 emails to lawmakers.
- In 2017, VOICES advocates sent 2,258 emails to lawmakers about Healthy Food Financing.
- In 2017, VOICES advocates sent 280 emails to lawmakers about Alabama First Class Pre-K.
- In 2017, VOICES advocates sent 34,560 emails to legislators, urging them to remove the child care licensing exemption and pass HB 277.
- In 2017, more than 200 advocates rallied at the state house for VOICES' 4th Annual Child Advocacy Day.
- In 2017, we added 1,466 new supporters to VOICES Child Advocacy Network this year.
- VOICES has the support of 57 organizational members in 2017.
- VOICES provided advocacy training to nearly 300 people in 2017.



Photo above shows former board members, Koko Mackin, Sue McInnish and the late Dr. Jim Dearth.



**VOICES for Alabama's Children** celebrated its 25th anniversary with community members and leaders to bolster awareness on child well-being.



# A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO **OUR DONORS**

## **CORPORATE & FOUNDATION PARTNERS**

Alabama Civil Justice Foundation  
Alabama Power Company  
Alabama Power Foundation  
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Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP  
Children's of Alabama  
Deak Rushton Charitable Fund  
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James Rushton I Foundation  
Marguerite Casey Foundation  
Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
The Daniel Foundation of Alabama  
The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross and  
Blue Shield of Alabama  
The Hobbs Foundation  
Voices for Healthy Kids  
Vulcan Materials Company

## **ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS**

Alabama Association of School Boards  
Alabama Children First  
Alabama Humanities Foundation  
Alabama Institute for Social Justice  
Alabama Network of Children  
Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers  
Alabama Parent Teachers Association  
Alabama Partnership for Children  
Alabama Public Television  
Alfred Saliba Family Services Center  
American Academy of Pediatrics, Alabama Chapter  
Autism Society of Alabama  
Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Birmingham  
Bonnie's Kids  
Boys & Girls Clubs of South Alabama  
Cahaba Center for Mental Health

CAJA of Marshall County  
Camp Fire Alabama  
Child Development Resources  
Child Protect  
Childcare Resources  
Children's Aid Society  
Children's Policy Council of Jefferson County  
Christian Services for Children in Alabama  
Circle of Care  
Colbert County Children's Council  
Community Action Partnership of North Alabama  
Community Service Programs of West Alabama  
East Alabama Mental Health - Special Deliveries  
Elmore County Partnership for Children  
Escambia Regional CAC  
Family Services Center of Calhoun County  
Food Bank of North Alabama  
Foster Grandparent Program  
Girl Scouts of Southern Alabama  
Human Development and Family Studies,  
Auburn University  
Kid One Transport  
Network for Good  
New Hope Children's Clinic  
Parents and Children Together (PACT)  
Pickens Co. Community Action Committee/  
Community Dev. Corp.  
Regional Children's Advocacy Center  
Sawyer's Day Camp  
St. Clair County Children's Policy Council  
Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement  
Tender Touch Daycare  
Tuscaloosa's One Place  
United Way of East Central Alabama  
United Way of Etowah County, Success By 6 Program  
Walker County Children's Policy Council  
YWCA of Central Alabama



Rhonda Mann speaking at the Parrish Elementary Ribbon Cutting for a new pre-K classroom.





## INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS

Anitra Henderson  
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Betty Likis  
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Carey Hinds  
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Suzanne Respass  
Tara Eason  
Thelma Braswell  
Theodore R. Bridgeforth  
Torrey DeKeyser  
Tranum and Martha Fitzpatrick

## A LOOK INTO OUR 2017 FINANCIALS

(UNAUDITED)



○ ADVOCACY | 59%

○ ADMINISTRATION & GENERAL | 20%

○ FUNDRAISING | 2%\*

○ RESEARCH | 19%

### Income

|                            |                |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Corporate and Foundations  | 399,511        |
| Individual                 | 15,608         |
| Organizational Support     | 15,642         |
| Interest Income            | 114            |
| Special Event Income       | 22,675         |
| Other Income               | 6,230          |
| <b>Totals</b>              | <b>459,780</b> |
| Grants Recv'd in 16 for 17 | 362,800        |
| <b>Totals</b>              | <b>822,580</b> |

### Expenses

|                        |                |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Advocacy               | 404,187        |
| Research               | 130,598        |
| Administration         | 134,185        |
| Special Event Expenses | 14,056         |
| Fundraising            | 4,272          |
| <b>Totals</b>          | <b>687,298</b> |

### Balance Sheet

#### Assets:

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Cash and Cash Equivalents                              | 249,282 |
| Prepaid Expenses and Other Assets                      | 4,201   |
| Property and Equipment net of Accumulated Depreciation | 15,360  |

**Total Assets 268,843**

#### Liabilities:

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Accounts Payable             | 45,570 |
| Accrued Expenses             | 10,143 |
| Capitalized Lease Obligation | 3,089  |

**Total Liabilities 58,802**

**Net Assets 210,041**

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets 268,843**

\* Includes Fundraising and Special Events

## 2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**Jeremy Arthur, President**

Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama  
Montgomery, AL

**Gwen Hall, Immediate Past President**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama  
Birmingham, AL

**Deak Rushton, Vice President**

James Rushton I Foundation  
Birmingham, AL

**Judd A. Harwood, Treasurer**

Bradley Arant Boult Cummings  
Birmingham, AL

**Michon Trent, Secretary**

Office of the Mayor—City of Mobile  
Mobile, AL

### GENERAL MEMBERS

**Frank A. Franklin, MD, MPH, PhD**

UAB Department of Health Behavior,  
School of Public Health  
Birmingham, AL

**Penney P. Hartline**

Friends of the Birmingham  
Botanical Gardens  
Birmingham, AL

**Anitra Belle Henderson**

Office of the Mayor—City of Mobile  
Mobile, AL

**V. Ellen Jackson**

Community Volunteer  
Birmingham, AL

**Nancy Young Fortner**

Huntsville City Schools (Retired)  
Vestavia, AL

**Michael Lynch**

Community Volunteer  
Greensboro, AL

**Suzanne Respass**

Children's of Alabama  
Birmingham, AL

**Francis E. Rushton Jr., M.D., FAAP**

Retired Pediatrician  
Birmingham, AL

**Joanne Schrantz**

Community Volunteer  
Auburn, AL

**Dr. B. Joyce Stallworth**

The University of Alabama  
Northport, AL

**Jera Stribling**

Joseph S. Bruno Foundation  
Birmingham, AL

### Staff:

**Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW, Executive Director**

**Kayla Farnon, Communications Director**

**Rebecca Jackson, Outreach Coordinator**

**Chessie Mann, Executive Assistant**

**Rhonda Mann, Deputy Director/Alabama Kids Count Director**

**Tara Preyer, Governmental Affairs Director**



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