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NEW DATA SHOWS NORTH CAROLINA STILL HAS WORK TO DO TO SUPPORT BABIES

Families with infants and toddlers, particularly in underserved communities, continue to struggle in the absence of strong national policy agenda

Raleigh, NC – New data released today shows babies in North Carolina and across the country continue to struggle in the absence of responsive policies from our local and national leaders. Children in North Carolina, particularly children of color and those living in families with low income, face daunting obstacles created in large part by structural racism and inadequate wage structures that make it difficult for them to reach their true potential.

The *State of Babies Yearbook: 2022*, released today by national early childhood development nonprofit ZERO TO THREE, comes at a critical time in our nation's response to families struggling amid the economic fallout from the ongoing public health crisis. Every parent and caregiver wants to give their child a strong start in life, but the *State of Babies Yearbook* makes clear that families with young children have long lacked the supports that would help in times of crisis or calm. The report compiles 60 indicators that affect the well-being of children prenatal to age three and provides an in-depth look at national and state-by-state progress across three policy areas: Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences.

Despite higher rankings in previous years, North Carolina was among 13 states across the United States to earn a near-bottom ranking this year. The *State of Babies Yearbook: 2022* shows that the littlest North Carolinians face big challenges, and that effective policies and programs in North Carolina can make a difference in their ability to reach their full potential. The *Yearbook* highlights areas where North Carolina must do better for its babies.

"Though all babies are born with unlimited potential, opportunities for North Carolina's babies to grow and flourish are not shared equally," said Miriam Calderón, Chief Policy Officer at ZERO TO THREE. "These findings show that disparities facing babies of color and babies in families with low income are draining our nation's future potential and leaving parents to fend for themselves. Without immediate action, our policymakers' longstanding failure to enact powerful family-centered policies and programs will have lasting effects on children, their families, the state of North Carolina, and our nation. As advocates for babies, we must push for policies that we know will address the barriers our children face."

This year's *Yearbook* shows that North Carolina continues to have one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, that child care is unaffordable and unavailable for working parents who need it,

and that nearly half of the 361,000 infants and toddlers in the state live in poverty or households with low income, the majority of whom are children of color. These issues have been made worse by the pandemic, which is still shaping the early experiences of North Carolina's babies every day.

"The *Yearbook* reveals that, ultimately, far too many babies in North Carolina are not getting what they need to thrive," said Jenna Nelson, Executive Director of the NC Early Education Coalition, which serves as the backbone organization for the Think Babies™ NC Alliance. "We have made progress, but the pandemic has revealed the gaps in our support systems for our state's youngest children and families. North Carolina's leaders must invest in strategies to support our youngest citizens and advance equity. Our babies can't wait."

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance, a state partner in ZERO TO THREE's *Think Babies™*, seeks to ensure that North Carolina's infants and toddlers benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences. Priorities include many of the key policies and programs that the *Yearbook* indicates our state is lacking, including expanding Medicaid; improving family economic security; expanding access to paid family leave; and increasing access to affordable, high-quality child care for infants and toddlers with a well-compensated early childhood workforce.

Decisions that affect babies and families happen at all levels of government. The Think Babies™ NC Alliance has joined ZERO TO THREE and more than 70 other national and state organizations to amplify the *Think Babies* message nationally and elevate the importance of the first three years in North Carolina. On May 17, they will join families and babies from all 50 states and DC to urge Congress to boldly invest in our future as part of the national *Strolling Thunder™* event.

To access the national profile and state data, visit stateofbabies.org.

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About ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all infants and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers. For more information, and to learn how to become a ZERO TO THREE member, please visit zerotothree.org, facebook.com/zerotothree, or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.

About *Think Babies*™

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to make the potential of every baby a national priority. When we *Think Babies* and invest in infants, toddlers, and their families, we ensure a strong future for us all. Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.

About the Think Babies™ NC Alliance

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to ensure that North Carolina's youngest children, prenatal to age 3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children

have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences. This statewide initiative to support the healthy development of infants and toddlers is led by a cross-sector Leadership Team of public and private early childhood organizations at the local and state level. The Think Babies™ NC Alliance is a proud partner in the national ZERO TO THREE's *Think Babies™* and the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers, which is funded in part by the Pritzker Children's Initiative. The NC Early Education Coalition serves as the backbone organization for the Think Babies™ NC Alliance. For more information, please visit www.ThinkBabiesNC.org.

About the North Carolina Early Education Coalition

The North Carolina Early Education Coalition works to ensure that all children – regardless of race, family income, or zip code – have access to high quality early care and learning experiences. Since 1990, the organization has highlighted the proven power of quality early childhood education by sharing information and resources with parents, professionals and policymakers. For more information, please visit www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org, facebook.com/nearlyedcoalition or follow [@NCEarlyEdCo on Twitter](https://twitter.com/NCEarlyEdCo).