State called bad for children
By Ana Radelat
Advertiser Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Louisiana is one of the worst places in the United States for children to live these days.

Kids Count, a report by a private foundation aimed at tracking the status of children, found that America's nearly 4 million children are increasingly growing up in environments that lack opportunities for them to succeed.

Louisiana ranked far lower than the national average in certain indicators that determine children's well-being, such as infant mortality and the number of children living in poverty.

Only Mississippi and the District of Columbia ranked lower than Louisiana in the report prepared by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

In 1991, about 30 percent of Louisiana's children lived in poverty and nearly 30 percent lived in single-parent families, the report said.

Louisiana suffered from a higher-than-average infant mortality rate, child death rate and teen violent death rate.

The report also showed that the national average for children graduating from high school on time was 68.8 percent, but only 56 percent for Louisiana's children.

According to Kids's Count, the median income of families with children in Louisiana in 1991 was $27,956.

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Specialist:
Family down, crime up
By Bill Decker
Staff Writer

Rick Dawes spends his days matching kids who have committed crimes with families who have the training to finish raising them.

Dawes sees another match, too: Juvenile crime and broken homes.

"I don't think I've got one"

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About 17 percent of Louisiana's children lived in severely distressed neighborhoods, compared to 6.2 percent nationwide, the report said.

The report characterized a neighborhood as severely distressed if it contained at least four of the five following characteristics: high poverty rate, high percent of female-headed families, high school dropouts, males unattached to the labor force and families receiving public assistance.

Perhaps the most startling statistic in the report was the increase in juvenile violent crime arrest rates for children aged 10-17. It jumped about 50 percent nationally from 1985 to 1991 and about 77 percent in Louisiana, where there were 483 arrests for each 100,000 teens in 1991.

To improve the lives of the nation's children, Kids Count advocated "overhauling" government human service programs and locating them closer to the neighborhoods that they serve.