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12:00 a.m., Tuesday, October 16, 2007

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Oregon Earns another “Barely Passing” Grade for Kids, But Help Is On the Way

*Children First’s annual Report Card shows state holds steady against 2010 targets,
while new investments bode well for future improvement*

Portland, OR – October 16, 2007 – Oregon earned a grade of “D” in overall child well-being in the annual *Report Card on the Status of Children* issued today by the nonpartisan group Children First for Oregon. Although the overall grade has not improved since last year, half of the 28 indicators have shown progress over the past 12 months. The lackluster grade can mostly be attributed to the use of stricter 2010 benchmark targets to calculate the grades.

The most dramatic developments were in the Family Financial Stability and Youth Development and Education categories, where 12 out of the 14 indicators (86 percent) showed improvement. “I’m feeling very optimistic,” said Robin Christian, Executive Director of Children First. “The state has held steady against tougher goals, and with the increased investments for kids made this year by the Oregon Legislature, I believe we are beginning to turn things around.”

Despite the disappointing grade of “F” in Early Care and Education, investments made by the 2007 State Legislature will improve that category’s grade as the data begins to catch up with the renewed financial commitment. These investments include \$40 million to improve the Employment Related Day Care Program, \$39 million to expand the highly successful Head Start program, and \$6.25 billion for K-12 education.

One major concern is that the Child Welfare indicators continue to move in the wrong direction. The number of children victimized by abuse or neglect reached a ten-year high in 2006, with at least 13.8 out of every 1,000 children in Oregon either victims of, or at substantial risk of, abuse or neglect. The stability of children in foster care placements also worsened, meaning that children in the state’s care are moving around more throughout the year, making it more difficult for them to succeed in school and feel safe and secure.

Even with the continued troubles in the state’s child welfare system, Children First has observed a renewed sense of responsibility for Oregon children’s over the past year. “The momentum for positive change has begun to build and is taking root,” said Christian. “It will continue to grow with the thoughtful dedication of every Oregonian, from elected leaders to everyday citizens, to get the job done.”

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Oregon can be a place where all children thrive. Here's how we start...

1. **Provide health care for Oregon kids:** Support Measure 50 on the November ballot and provide health care to more than 100,000 currently uninsured kids.
2. **Improve the child welfare system:** Adapt best practices to reform the child welfare system making wise investments in prevention and ensuring every foster child is fully supported.
3. **Partner with the business community:** The private sector knows that what's good for kids is good for business. Smart public investments for children, such as health care coverage for every child, will save Oregon businesses money.

SUMMARY OF 2007 GRADES:

Overall Grade:	D
Family Financial Stability	C-
Health	F
Early Care and Education	F
Youth Development and Education	C+
Child Welfare	D

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2007 REPORT CARD:

Positive Trends in Child Well-Being:

- The number of children in poverty is down from approximately 160,000 to 141,000.
- Math and reading scores among 8th graders continue to improve.
- The unemployment rate in Oregon dropped from 6.1% to 5.4%.

Negative Trends in Child Well-Being:

- The rate of uninsured children has increased (up from 12.3 percent to 12.6 percent).
- The number of known victims of abuse and neglect reached a 10-year high, with 12,043 victimized by abuse or neglect, or 13.8 per 1,000 Oregon children.
- The number of mothers receiving prenatal care decreased.
- Use of alcohol and illicit drugs among 8th graders has increased.

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*Children First works to make Oregon a place where all children thrive. **We** educate and engage Oregonians to promote programs and policies that **get results for kids**. KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization that funds a nationwide network of projects that support disadvantaged children and families. www.cffo.org.*

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