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5038 Oregon declines as place to raise kids, survey says

PORTLAND (AP) — A national survey of the best places to raise children puts Oregon near the bottom of the list.

Oregon ranked 40th in the poll — which compiled national data ranging from child poverty to juvenile crime — registering a sharp drop last year's ranking of 29. The report, issued this week by the Children's Rights Council, is the most recent indicator that despite low unemployment, a strong economy and a national reputation for livability, many of Oregon's children are not faring well.

"We recognize that this state has a challenge in front of it in terms of taking care of its children," said Bob Applegate, spokesman for Gov. John Kitzhaber.

The Washington, D.C.-based Children's Rights Council survey follows a May survey by the national Annie E. Casey Foundation that also showed the quality of children's lives declining in Oregon.

The latest report measured

each state and Washington, D.C., in the following areas: rates of child abuse and neglect, immunizations under age 2, high school dropouts, child poverty, child deaths, infant mortality, mothers not receiving prenatal care in the first three months of pregnancy, juvenile arrests, teen births and divorce. The survey ranked Maine as the best place to raise a child. The District of Columbia placed last, but several Western states, including California in 46th place, joined Oregon on the bottom of the list.

Oregon may have earned a poor ranking because it isn't helping the families who need state assistance the most, said Betty Uchytel, policy coordinator for the state office for Services to Children and Families.

"Oregon is a good place for intact families," she said. "But for a family living in poverty, services are not as available."

Still, Oregon parents shouldn't panic about the condition of child services, said Gary Dombroff, director of Children First for Oregon.