

# The Oregonian

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## For kids, we're No. 40

*Oregon is a distant 40th, just ahead of Mississippi, in a ranking of the best states in which to raise children*

Portland sounds like a fabulous place to raise children — Portland, Maine, that is.

Maine is the best state in the nation in which to raise a child, according to the Children's Rights Council, a national child advocacy organization. Massachusetts is second, Connecticut third and Vermont fourth.

Oregon is way, way down the list of best places to raise children, at 40th, one behind South Carolina and just ahead of Idaho and Mississippi.

There are questions about the methodology used in the rankings, and it's tempting to react defensively to Oregon's dismal showing. The Children's Rights Council has issued the same list but used different measurements over the past five years. Oregon was 22nd on the list in 1995 and 29th last year. It's not readily apparent from where we sit that Oregon has become a substantially worse place to raise children in recent years.

But that's just state pride talking. The hard truth is that there is plenty of statistical evidence showing serious problems with child well-being in Oregon. This is the second national ranking of children's issues in three months in which Oregon has fared poorly. The Casey Foundation's widely respected annual survey of child well-being — known as Kids Count — regularly places Oregon at around 30th national-

ly in a ranking of children's issues.

The Children's Rights Council rankings released Tuesday are based on averaging the rates of abuse and neglect, immunization, school dropouts, infant mortality, prenatal care, child death, juvenile arrests, teen births and divorce.

Those aren't the only ways to calculate the well being of children. They may not even be the best. But they clearly illustrate some of the difficulties that children face. You can't argue with these facts: Oregon has a high percentage of student dropouts, a high rate of juvenile crime, a high number of marriages ending in divorce, and comparatively low rates of prenatal care and child immunizations.

Oregon is making a serious effort in some of these areas — especially in increasing the rate of immunizations — but doing little in others. Local commissions on children and families have launched major youth initiatives in Portland, Eugene, Bend and other communities.

The Legislature, meanwhile, reluctantly agreed to a \$56 million juvenile crime prevention plan, but failed to give schools the resources to attack the dropout rate.

We must work even harder to make this a better place for kids. It hurts to see Oregon so far down the list of best places to raise children. Our state doesn't belong there.