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OUR VIEWS

^{S038} Oversight of child-care centers is long overdue

Parents deserve the best care and protection for their children.

After years of neglect, the state is improving oversight of child care providers.

The Oregon Child Care Division has begun conducting on-site inspections of all new in-home child care providers before issuing registration certificates.

The state also has the staff and funding necessary to investigate serious complaints about child-care businesses. About half of the complaints the state receives about in-home child-care centers will be investigated, compared with 20 percent in past years.

That's significant because nearly half of Oregon's children 13 and younger are in registered family child care — private homes with fewer than 10 kids. There are about 10,000 in-home providers in the state.

Along with more inspections and investigations, a new state law has increased training requirements for in-home child-care providers.

Registered providers must receive instruction in infant and child first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, child-abuse detection and food handling. Each time they renew their state registration, providers will have to get an additional eight hours of training.

These improvements are overdue.

Until this year, most homes caring for children escaped state inspections, even if there were complaints.

Of 131 complaints filed against family providers between July and October 1999, only 26 were investigated, according to Children's First for Oregon, a nonprofit advocacy group.

It's important to recognize that most child-care providers are caring and conscientious people. They work hard and have parents' respect and gratitude because of their dedication.

Parents have the ultimate obligation to investigate and monitor child-care centers — and ensure their kids are getting the care they need.

But the state must provide careful oversight of child-care centers and investigate all serious complaints.

That's now happening.

Even more encouraging, the state is developing rules to make sure family care centers deliver quality services, such as providing age-appropriate activities and time for rest and play.

Providers also will have to maintain better attendance records and post their registration certificates where parents can see them.

State inspectors eventually should visit all child-care centers regularly and enforce higher-care standards.

Children deserve the best daily care and protection.