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State rarely investigates in-home child-care complaints

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SALEM (AP) — The state rarely investigates in-home child-care complaints, putting one-quarter of Oregon's children at risk, according to a new report.

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

The findings released Wednesday comes as the state prepares to launch the strictest family child-care safety regulations in two decades.

Statewide, about 50,000 children receive care in registered family child care — private homes with fewer than 10 children.

For years, the state has said that it did not have the staff or funding to investigate complaints against the roughly 10,000 family child-care providers statewide, said Linda Stern, licensing manager for the state Child Care Division.

But armed with several new laws and almost \$1 million from last year's Legislature, the division now is required to do an onsite review of any new family child-care provider registering with the state for the first time.

Stern said the state will be able to investigate about half the complaints it receives, compared with 20 percent now. Before, the state had only the resources to follow up when children were in imminent danger.