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## OREGON RECEIVES A C- GRADE ON CHILDREN'S STATUS

### No Improvement in Grade for 3 Consecutive Years

The 1999 report on "The Status of Children in Oregon" grades the status of the state's children a C- for the third consecutive year, Children First for Oregon officials note in their annual report.

During a period of strong economic growth for the state, this below-average grade for the well-being of children reflects a lack of investment in Oregon's most important resource.

Although Oregon has experienced incredible growth in jobs, corporate well-being and per capita income during the 1990s, its children continue to lag behind.

Child abuse and neglect, for example, are at their highest level this decade, more youth are dropping out of high school and the proportion of children in poverty has increased during the last eight years.

However, there have been some areas of progress in the last few years and signs that the overall grade may be starting to improve. Teen pregnancy decreased for the third year in a row, fewer young people are being arrested and substance abuse among 8th graders declined for the first time during the 1990s.

This year's report card, based on ratings in five crucial areas, includes the following marks:

#### •Investment in Families: C-

This mark is based on the following areas: *childhood poverty* (16% of children under age 18 live in poverty. The proportion of children in poverty has increased from 14% in 1990); *uninsured children* (10% of children in Oregon under age 18 lack health insurance. The rate of children without health insurance is on the rise for the first time since prior to 1990); *childhood support* (68% of current requested, court-ordered child support payments are actually paid. The percentage of child support collected has improved since 1990 but has remained level for the last several years); *affordable housing* (70% of low-income renter households spend more than 30% of their household income for housing. An increasing percentage of poor families must spend a disproportionate amount of their income on housing, leaving little left over for other essentials).

#### •Early Childhood: B-

This grade is based on the following: *prenatal care* (80% of babies are born to mothers who receive early prenatal care. Early prenatal care has shown little improvement during the 1990's and much progress is needed to reach the 2000 benchmark of 90%); *infant mortality* (5.9 of every 1,000 babies die before their first birthday in Oregon. The state has made significant strides in reducing the rate of infant mortality during the 1990s); *immunizations* (75% of Oregon two-year-olds are up to date on their immunizations. The percentage of two-year-olds with current immunizations continues to make slow but steady improvement in Oregon); *child care supply* (child care is available for 21 out of every 100 children under age 13 in Oregon. Oregon has met the 2000 benchmark for child care supply yet infant and toddler care is still a challenge for many parents to find).

#### •Safety: B-

This mark is based on the following three areas: *child abuse & neglect* (12.3 of every 1,000 children in Oregon are confirmed to have been abused or neglected. The percentage of children abused or neglected is at its highest level since prior to 1990. Currently, nearly 1 out of 80 children in Oregon is

a known victim of abuse or neglect); *child death rate* (23.7 of every 100,000 children ages 1-14 die in Oregon. The leading causes of death for children include unintentional injury, cancer and homicide. The current child death rate in Oregon is 19% lower than the 1990 rate); *crimes against persons* (14.5 crimes against persons are reported per 1,000 Oregonians. Violent crime in the state has declined in the last few years and is now 15% lower than the 1990 rate).

#### •Teen Years: D-

Four criteria are utilized to arrive at this rating: *juvenile arrest rate* (There were 53.9 juvenile arrests per 1,000 children under age 18 in Oregon. The rate of juvenile arrests has decreased for two consecutive years after rapid increases through much of the 1990s); *substance abuse* (26% of 8th grade students reported drinking alcohol in the last month. 19% of 8th grade students reported using illicit drugs in the last month. 20% of 8th grade students reported smoking cigarettes in the last month. Self-reported substance abuse among 8th graders has declined in all three categories over the last two years; however, all rates remain higher than their 1990 rate); *teen pregnancy* (17.2 of every 1,000 girls ages 10-17 got pregnant in Oregon. The rate of teen pregnancy has declined for three consecutive years and is 13% lower than the 1990 rate); *suicide attempts* (There were 201 documented suicide attempts among youth in Oregon ages 10-17 for every 100,000 youth. The teen suicide rate is at its lowest since 1990. But suicide continues to be the second leading cause of death among teens ages 10-17).

#### •Education: C

Again, four areas are utilized to determine this mark: *reading proficiency* (56% of 8th grade students met or exceeded state reading standards. Reading proficiency among 8th graders has improved 17% since 1995); *high school dropout* (6.9% of high school students dropped out of school. The high school dropout rate in Oregon has risen steadily for the last five years, leaving many students unprepared for today's job market); *math proficiency* (52% of 8th grade students met or exceeded state math standards. *Math proficiency* among 8th graders has increased slightly during recent years and is now 6% higher than 1995 levels); *structured work experience* (17% of high school students completed a school-related work experience including a practicum, clinical experience, community service learning or school-based enterprise program. The percentage of students in structured work experiences has made modest improvement since 1995 but participation rates remain far below the 2000 benchmark of 65%).

**Note:** Letter grades are based on an objective analysis of 1) Change since 1990 (or earliest data available after 1990), and 2) Progress towards 2000 Oregon Benchmark goals (where available) compared to 1995 data.

All data reported are from 1998 except infant mortality, child death rate and teen suicide attempts, which are 1997, and reading and math proficiency, which are 1999.

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Children First for Oregon is a statewide advocacy organization for children and families. The organization utilizes public education, community outreach and public policy analysis to work to make children Oregon's top priority.