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## Majority of abuse reports go unchecked

*Children First for Oregon says that reports of suspected child abuse are increasing but that the percentage investigated is falling*

BY DON COLBURN  
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State caseworkers investigated fewer than half the reports of suspected child abuse in Oregon last year, a report by a nonprofit advocacy group shows.

More than 19,600 reports of abuse went unassessed, according to the annual report by Children First for Oregon.

The report closely follows two audits commissioned by the Oregon Department of Human Services which found that most counties did not have access to criminal or probation records for potential child abusers. Caseworkers often submitted inade-

quate paperwork, the audits found.

In a recent high-profile case in Clackamas County, the department was criticized for not responding to repeated allegations that 12-year-old Ashley Pond was being sexually abused by Ward Weaver, a neighbor. Weaver has been charged in Ashley's death.

The percentage of suspected abuse reports that Oregon authorities investigated — with interviews of family members and a physical examination of the possible victim — was 46 percent last year, compared with 61 percent in 1997.

The follow-up rate varied widely from county to county, from lows of 20 percent in Washington County and 27 percent in Clackamas County to highs of 98 percent in Union County and 97 percent in Polk and Yamhill counties. Multnomah County's assessment rate was 38 percent.

"The numbers reflect that the way we handle child abuse across the state is all over the map," said

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