

Children First decries poverty

The News-Register staff 5038

Teen pregnancy and dropout are continuing to decline in Oregon. Reading and math scores have improved and fewer cases of abuse and neglect are being reported.

Despite those encouraging trends, Children First for Oregon, a nonprofit child advocacy group, dropped the state's "grade" for child welfare from last year's B to a C, primarily because of increasing poverty rates.

One out of every six Oregon children now lives in extreme poverty, according to Children First, the highest reported rate since 1994. And unemployment is at a 15-year-high.

"Oregon has more than 140,000 children living in extreme poverty — living in families where parents struggle to provide even the basics of food, shelter and health care," said Executive Director Marie Hoeven.

"A financially stable household is a foundation for a safe, secure childhood," she said. "The lingering economic downturn has aggravated the weak financial health of many Oregon families and exposed the weaknesses of existing public supports."

See **POVERTY**, Page A6

Poverty Continued from A1

Children First gave the state an F for family financial stability; a D for health; a C+ for early care and education; a C for youth development and education and a B+ for safety. The overall grade worked out to C-

"Tough economic times demand a renewed commitment to help families achieve lasting financial security," said Children First's policy director, Tina Kotek. "The solutions are attainable.

"Every child deserves health insurance; working families need access to quality child care; and Oregon needs state fiscal policies that better support families. Our children deserve the best we can do. We can and must do better."

The 2003 evaluation was sponsored by Portland General Electric.

For more information, see Children First's website at www.childrenfirstfororegon.org.