

⁵⁰³⁸ Oregon family financial report earns a failing "f"

Children First's Annual Report Card shows too many families struggle to afford basic necessities, putting their children and Oregon's future at risk.

Oregon earned a failing, "F" grade in family financial stability in the annual Report Card on the Status of Children issued by Children First for Oregon, a non-profit policy voice for children. In the report, the growing number of children living in extreme poverty, the state's high unemployment rate, the rising percentage of children without health insurance and other key indicators represent a disturbing decline in child well being.

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

The state's failure to invest in an adequate safety net for children and families means Oregonians will pay the price for years to come. With one in six children now living in extreme poverty, the economic gains made by working poor families just a few years ago may now be lost.

"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 successes show us what can be achieved with smart investments in prevention and early intervention strategies," Hoeven said. "Working together, Oregon communities can strengthen families, improve their chances for financial independence and reduce the burden poverty places on our children."

Positive Trends in Child Well Being: Far fewer girls ages 15-17 became pregnant than a decade ago; high school dropout rate declined for the fourth straight year; confirmed cases of abuse and neglect have declined for the last several years; incidents of violent crime have dropped over the last seven years; third grade reading and math proficiency scores improved over the last several years.

Negative Trends in Child Well Being: More children live in extreme poverty (17 percent) - the highest reported rate since 1994. Oregon's unemployment rate is at a 15-year high; the number of children without health insurance is on the rise again; affordable housing and child care for low-income families continue to be hard to find; and youth alcohol use remains high with 25 percent of eight graders reporting drinking.

"This report card is a wake up call to the state," Kotek said. "Most parents would be unhappy with a 'C-' and immediately ask how their child could improve. We hope this is the question everyone asks our leaders today."