

## Tina Kotek

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**From:** Robartlaw@cs.com  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 21, 2004 9:12 AM  
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**Subject:** AP: Child Welfare dips to 12 year low

**Associated Press - 09/21/2004**

### **Child welfare dips to 12 year low**

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) - Young people in Oregon are faring worse now on measures of poverty, child drug abuse and other indicators of children's welfare than any time in the past 12 years, a nonprofit group concluded in its annual report card.

Among the reasons for the state's bad marks from Children First for Oregon: a high rate of uninsured children, a high unemployment rate and a lack of affordable housing and child care for low-income families.

The overall grade dropped from a B- in 2002 and C- last year to a D+ this year. That's the lowest mark since Children First began its annual review 12 years ago.

Despite improvement on some measures, the report found ``a shocking decline in the overall well-being of Oregon's children."

The grades are derived from a complex formula based on the trend for the past two years, the trend for the past decade and how close the latest data come to 2005 targets set by the Oregon Progress Board. The formula has not changed since 1992, said Tina Kotek, the group's policy director.

The report found some positive trends. More 2-year-olds than ever are up-to-date on their immunizations. Far fewer girls ages 15 to 17 become pregnant than a decade ago. The high school dropout rate declined for the fifth straight year.

But those bright spots were not enough to offset the overall dismal grade.

Oregon's annual report card is part of a national Kids Count project financed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charity that focuses on needy children and families. Portland General Electric sponsored the report card.

The Oregon Progress Board is an independent state agency, chaired by the governor, that tracks strategic state goals. Every two years it sets targets for 90 measures of progress in education, the economy, the environment, public safety, social service and health.

The Progress Board itself used to give letter grades to assess Oregon's performance against its targets. After getting negative feedback that letter grades were simplistic and potentially misleading, the board switched to a more nuanced evaluation.

``That's the difference between the Progress Board and a report put out by an advocacy group," said Rita Conrad, the board's acting director. Without questioning the integrity of the Children First report card, she said the group's letter grades on some health measures could be misleading.

9/21/2004