

# Many abuse reports unheeded

*Though reports of abuse and neglect are up 61 percent since 1994 in Oregon, many go uninvestigated, a report says*

**BY MICHELLE ROBERTS**  
THE OREGONIAN

The state's child protection system has failed to keep up with an increasing number of abuse and neglect reports, resulting in a "disturbing" trend in which more than half of all calls are not investigated, a child advocacy group says in a report released today.

Reports of child abuse and neglect have increased steadily over the past decade, up 61 percent since 1994. In 2003, the Department of Human Services received 42,455 complaints of possible child abuse and neglect, but assessed 20,552. Of those, 9,447 were found to be

substantiated cases of abuse or neglect, state records show.

"With only 48 percent of child abuse reports being assessed statewide, many children are left in harm's way, forced to fend for themselves," said the Status of Oregon's Children County Data Book 2004, an annual report published by the nonprofit advocacy group Children First for Oregon.

A struggling economy and the resulting stress to families have increased the likelihood that Oregon children will be abused, the report said. The group also found that one in every 100 children in Oregon is a confirmed victim of child abuse.

"It's not an encouraging report," said Ramona Foley, head of the DHS unit that serves children and families. "At the same time, we're going to work zealously to turn it around."

The report comes at a time of increas-

ing scrutiny for DHS. Recent high-profile cases involving the death and injury of children in state care reveal a system straining to keep up, Foley said.

Five-year-old Jordan Knapp weighed 28 pounds when an emergency crew responded to a 9-1-1 call to her foster home Dec. 7. The girl's foster parents have been charged with felony mistreatment.

One week later, emergency workers found 15-month-old Ashton Parris suffering severe head injuries after the state returned him to his birth mother as part of a state-supervised plan to reunite the family.

Ashton died three days later. A criminal investigation is under way.

Foley said she has asked a team of national child protection experts to come to Salem this week to review Oregon's current system of assessing child abuse calls, which was instituted in July 2003.

Please see **REPORT**, Page B8

## INVESTIGATING CHILD ABUSE

The state investigates about half the child abuse/neglect complaints it receives, and fewer than one in three complaints result in findings of abuse/neglect.



Sources: Oregon Department of Human Services, Children First for Oregon

MICHAEL MOORE/THE OREGONIAN