

# Prevention plans needed to fight increase in child abuse, neglect in state'

*Children First for Oregon releases 2004 County Data Book, which details data on the safety and health of the state's children*

Oregon's children are facing increased threats to their health and safety, according to Children First for Oregon's County Data Book 2004, which was recently released at the Capitol.

Every county in Oregon is dealing with a disturbing number of children who are victims of abuse and neglect, who lack access to

quality health care or who go without nutritious meals during the summer months. With Gov. Ted Kulongoski's proposed budget further reducing proven programs that work to strengthen the health and safety of Oregon's children, these numbers are an urgent reminder to lawmakers that our state's future is under threat.

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## POINT OF VIEW

### Children First for Oregon

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# Child: 'Safety net'

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"If we are to keep children safe, Oregon must increase, not decrease, its investment in prevention and intervention services," said Robin Christian, Children First's executive director.

"Legislators and the governor have a responsibility to protect kids. More cuts are not the answer. That's why we support exploring all revenue recovery ideas, including a rigorous review of all tax breaks, because our children's safety should be a top priority."

A struggling economy and the resulting stress to families have placed increased demands on the state's child protection system.

Recent high-profile cases involving the death and injury of children in state care reveal a system straining to keep up.

The number of reports of suspected child abuse and neglect have risen 61 percent over the last 10 years.

Today, less than half of these reports are investigated.

For the first time in four years, more children entered foster care than exited.

Recommendations to improve children's health and safety from the 2004 Data Book include:

- Keep our children safe by expanding the availability of alcohol and drug treatment programs and strengthening investments in child abuse/neglect prevention and intervention.

- Improve access to quality health care by expanding school-based health services, investing in

health insurance for more eligible children and ensuring access to health care for low-income parents.

- Help foster children and youth to succeed by decreasing the number of placement changes and improving services and supports for youth aging out of the foster care system.

- Fight childhood hunger by investing in child nutrition programs, such as summer food programs, and building up the financial stability of families.

"The governor's budget falls way short of being a sound investment strategy for Oregon's children," Christian said.

"We have to reverse the short-sightedness of the last few years and stop the nickel and dime decisions that undermine the state's safety net for kids."

#### Data Highlights:

##### Abuse/Neglect

- Today, one child in every 100 children in Oregon is a confirmed victim of child abuse.

- The rate of confirmed victims of child abuse/neglect and children at substantial risk of harm ("threat of harm") increased from 2002 to 2003 (up 9 percent and 18 percent, respectively).

- Between 1994 and 2003, reports of child abuse or neglect increased by 61 percent.

- In 2003, only 48 percent of the reports of children being harmed or at a substantial risk of being harmed received further investigation after the initial intake.

##### Foster Care

- There are 13,447 children