

State's kids need more protection, audit says

*An independent review of
Oregon's child-welfare system
calls for reducing caseloads and
increasing training for staff*

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An independent review prompted by two high-profile cases of child abuse recommends that Oregon reorient its entire child-welfare system to focus on safety in policy, procedures and training.

But the most important step the state can take to protect children is to reduce the caseload each worker handles, the report found.

Wayne Holder, a national expert with the Action for Child Protection in New Mexico, will present his findings in Salem today to the House subcommittee on Child Welfare. He was traveling Wednesday and unavailable for comment.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski ordered the independent review on Dec. 20, three days after 15-month-old Ashton Parris died from injuries suffered while living with his parents under state supervision. Earlier that month, emergency workers found Jordan Knapp, a 5-year-old foster child, severely malnourished and suffering from head injuries.

Both children were from Clackamas County.

In a prepared statement Wednesday, Kulongoski promised to use the review "as a tool to continue making Oregon's child-welfare system more accountable both to the citizens of Oregon and to the children the system is charged to protect."

The reviewer, Holder, is also a senior consultant for the National Resource

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