

Politics block protecting kids

Lawmakers' major plans to reform Oregon's child welfare system remain largely stalled as the session nears its end

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Time is running out for the Legislature to enact major changes in Oregon's system for protecting its most vulnerable children.

Against the backdrop of several high-profile child abuse cases, lawmakers

convened in January vowing to do something about the growing problem. About 200 bills dealing with child welfare have been introduced this session. From the start, House Speaker Karen Minnis, R-Wood Village, appointed a special subcommittee on child abuse to sift through the proposals.

But with the House stalled and legislative leaders consumed by the biennial budget battle, the prospects for far-reaching legislation appear to be dwindling.

Some child abuse bills have made their way through the system. They in-

clude Senate Bill 755, which will require school employees with "reasonable cause" who suspect child abuse by a co-worker to report their suspicions to a supervisor and to law enforcement authorities or the Department of Human Services.

Another measure, Senate Bill 947, will require Human Services to open records to public inspection in abuse cases involving a child's death or serious injury. Senate Bill 94 will give the agency more flexibility in deciding which cases of alleged abuse should be reported to law enforcement immedi-

ately.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski has signed the three measures. Others are still percolating through the Legislature. Last week, the Senate sent Kulongoski House Bill 3075, which would allow some children to remain in the same school when they are taken into foster care or transferred between foster homes.

A bill Minnis backed as the main vehicle to overhaul the child protection system is scheduled for a vote on the House floor Sunday night. Only six Please see **CHILD WELFARE**, Page D3