

Study: States lax in child care regulation [US] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Many states are distressingly lax in their regulation and oversight of child care centers, according to a new nationwide survey which gives its lowest marks to Idaho and Louisiana and its highest grade to the far-flung system run by the U.S. military.

Among the common problems in the states are infrequent inspections, deficient safety requirements, and low hiring standards — including lack of full criminal background checks — for center employees.

"State child care standards and oversight in this nation are not protecting our children and are not preparing them for success in school," said Linda Smith, executive director of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which was releasing the first-of-its-kind ranking Thursday.

She urged action by Congress and state legislatures. An estimated 12 million children under age 5 are in non-parental child care each week.

The association reviewed policies and regulations for all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Defense Department, which ranked a decisive No. 1 overall and led both subcategories — one measuring standards that are in place, the second measuring how vigorously the standards are enforced.

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"Standards are meaningless without oversight," Smith said. "The Defense Department has good enforcement, and that has brought their program to a much higher level."

...

Criteria for the rankings included caseloads for center inspectors, frequency of inspections, health and safety requirements, background checks, staff qualifications and activities offered to children.

The report, "We Can Do Better," said eight states do not even require annual inspections of child care centers, let alone conduct them quarterly as Smith's association recommends. The association also advises that each inspector have no more than 50 centers to monitor; the report said 21 states have caseloads of more than 140 per inspector.

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- reprinted from CBS News

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