Roemer vows more funding to inspect day care centers

By MARSHA SHULER
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Gov. Buddy Roemer promised Monday to provide extra money to hire additional day care center inspectors and begin random checks in the wake of a nationally-televised news documentary that zeroed in on two facilities in Jefferson Parish.

Roemer said he will ask the Senate to add $300,000 to the Department of Social Services' budget to increase the number of inspectors from 13 to 22.

He said five of the inspectors would serve on a roving basis so they can make "random, unexpected reviews of day care centers."

The proposed $9.2 billion state budget bill is in the hands of the Senate Finance Committee where the administration plans to offer the day care amendment.

The action comes in response to ABC-TV's Prime Time Live documentary Daycare Nightmares.

The program featured All American Child Care and Learning Center and An Enchanted World Day Care and Preschool, both in Jefferson Parish, as substandard centers where children were neglected and dirty.

A third center, Beverly Day Nursery and Pre-School of Metairie was described as well-run.

Network producers posing as child care researchers set up hidden cameras in all three businesses, and made tapes over a seven-month period ending about four months ago.

"I am concerned about it," Roemer said.

He said the program was brought to his attention and he immediately consulted with DSS Secretary May Nelson to determine what needed to be done.

He said Nelson said more manpower is needed. He said the state has one inspector for every 130 day care centers. He said the national average is an inspector every 75 to 85 day care centers.

The hiring of additional inspectors will bring the state in line with the national average, he said.

He said that combined with the unannounced visits should help but "I'm not going to tell you that it's enough to satisfy me yet."

Roemer said day care centers can get ready for inspections today because they are announced ahead of time.