



**OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE**

Advocacy Alert

**January 2008
Volume 14 Issue 1**



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

In February the Oregon Legislature will convene for a special session. Please contact your state senator and representative and urge them to support the Housing Alliance's agenda to preserve affordable housing. The Housing Alliance is asking for \$4 million of state general funds to purchase subsidized properties at risk of being lost to the private market.

Message:

Preservation of affordable housing is far more cost effective than building new housing units. The Preservation Revolving Loan Fund would allow those interested in preserving affordable housing to act quickly to purchase properties from willing sellers, preventing the displacement of residents, and preserving rent subsidies that keep these properties affordable to some of our most vulnerable Oregonians. For more information, see article on page 2.

Oregon agriculture + schools + school gardens

Oregon legislators are poised to bring more great Oregon agricultural products to school lunch plates but there's one critical thing missing — coordination between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education.

In 2007, the Legislature created a position within the Department of Agriculture to bring local produce to the classroom. Now, in the 2008 Legislature, it is time to create a complementary position within the Department of Education so we can fulfill the promise of farm to school in Oregon.

Farm to school is good for kids and for farmers. By

adding more Oregon farm products to school cafeterias, children can eat fresh and locally grown food, while strengthening Oregon's agricultural economy. Children are facing epidemics of obesity and diabetes, and our farmers are facing tough economic times. What better way to help both than selling Oregon's wonderful agricultural bounty to school kids?

Farmers have an advocate through the Department of Agriculture to help them market foods to schools, but a huge gap remains. School food-service directors look to the Department of Education for assistance on school food purchasing and preparation.

Farm-to-school and school garden projects are gaining interest across Oregon. But they need coordination and technical assistance right now to fulfill their potential. Coordination between the departments of Agriculture and Education will help them move forward more quickly and efficiently.

This session, it is time to plant the seed for an effective partnership between farmers and Oregon's kids by funding an essential pilot position at the Department of Education. The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and Oregon Food Bank will be supporting this effort during the February session.

Legislative Yellow Pages

State Legislative Information
1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem)
(503) 986-1000 (in Salem)
www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide

Members of Congress

Senator Smith
(503) 326-3386
Senator Wyden
(503) 326-7525
Rep. Wu (District 1)
(503) 326-2901
Rep. Walden (District 2)
(541) 776-4646
Rep. Blumenauer (District 3)
(503) 231-2300
Rep. DeFazio (District 4)
(541) 465-6732
Rep. Hooley (District 5)
(503) 588-9100

The voices of hunger in Oregon

Over the past few months, Oregon Food Bank staff has once again logged hundreds of miles having conversations with emergency food box recipients as part of the annual Voices project. With the help of staff from regional food banks and local agencies, the focus groups involved more than 60 participants from seven Oregon communities: Astoria, Estacada, Grants Pass, Ontario, Portland, Springfield, and The Dalles.

The Voices project report includes the voices of peo-

ple working and unemployed, homeless and homeowners, those with health insurance and without. The participants were as diverse as they were candid and sincere. They came to the focus groups to share why they were hungry and how hunger affects their lives, with the hopes that their stories would be shared beyond the meeting-room walls.

When Oregon Food Bank began the Voices project more than a decade ago, Oregon had the nation's highest rate of hunger.

Now, Oregon is among the middle of the pack in that rating. Despite the statistically reduced-rate of hunger, hunger relief agencies throughout the state continue to help a staggering number of people. In addition, people are requesting far more than help feeding their families.

In light of Oregon's improved rate of hunger, why is there still an ever-growing need to help make ends meet? What does a significant drop in the rate of hunger mean for those who still struggle?

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Housing Alliance seeks money for preservation, homeless strategies

The Housing Alliance will be requesting \$4.75 million during the February 2008 legislative session to address two critical issues:

1. The preservation of subsidized affordable housing, and
2. The lack of resources to support local strategies to end homelessness.

The alliance is asking for \$4 million of state general funds to be allocated into a Preservation Revolving Loan Fund to purchase subsidized properties at risk of being lost to the private market.

The Preservation Revolving Loan Fund would allow those interested in preserving the affordability of this housing to act quickly to purchase properties from willing sellers, preventing the dis-

placement of residents, and preserving rent subsidies that keep these properties affordable to some of our most vulnerable Oregonians.

More than 7,000 rent-subsidized apartments in more than 250 properties across the state are at risk. These properties are scattered throughout the state, and provide affordable homes to seniors, disabled persons, and hard-working families. The \$4 million in state dollars would help leverage millions of additional dollars to keep these units affordable. It would also protect federal rent-subsidy payments in the Section 8 and Rural Development programs.

The other \$750,000 requested would support the

development of local solutions to homelessness and would help counties and local jurisdictions as they work to realign their systems to better serve the growing numbers of displaced households and homeless families and individuals.

Despite the devoted efforts of many organizations and individuals, more families and children are homeless in Oregon than ever before. On any given night, 12,966 individuals are provided emergency shelter across the state. This year's count of homeless school children across Oregon highlights the need for this step. During the 2006-2007 school year, more than 15,500 school-age children were homeless for at least a part of the year.

The Housing Alliance proposal is modeled after successful efforts in other states, particularly Michigan. State funds would allow capacity grants (up to \$16,000) to counties to support local planning and coordination. It would also fund centralized technical assistance, training, and coordination through contracted services directed by Housing and Community Services and the Ending Homelessness Advisory Council.

OHRTF and OFB will be supporting this package in the February 2008 session and urge you to "Take Five" to let your legislators know you support the package too!



Voices of hunger

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These questions were at the core of this year's focus groups. To address the changing climate of hunger in Oregon, Oregon Food Bank returned to the same communities that participated in the Voices project during the years Oregon had the highest rate of hunger, between the years of 1996 – 2002.

By sharing their own experiences, the participants added to the collective story of hunger in Oregon. The message they sent is: the rising cost of living has disproportionately affected many Oregonians.

In The Dalles, a woman is running out of time to find a good-paying job that will

support her family. In Ontario, a family is living paycheck to paycheck as it squeezes the household budget to its limit. In Astoria, a group of women living in temporary shelter share their personal struggles of finding affordable, permanent housing. In Portland, a woman without health insurance battled a serious flu without seeking medical help, until it progressed to a life-threatening bout of pneumonia, creating medical bills she can't afford. And across the state, parents are faced with the dilemma of feeding their families with limited financial resources.

The following story is an excerpt from the 2007

Voices project: *Terry, in Grants Pass, reflects on a time when all she had to offer her family for dinner was popcorn. "We lived on popcorn, that's what we had." As her children sit down for dinner she gives each one a plate with a mound of white, fluffy popcorn. "My son used to take the popcorn on the plate, separate it out and say, 'This is my steak, this is my potato, this is my vegetable' and say 'mmm...mom, you really made a good meal.'"*

The entire 2007 Voices report can be found on the Oregon Food Bank Web site.

The Advocacy Alert is published jointly by Oregon Food Bank (OFB) and the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF).

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