



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Please call your representative and ask for their support on House Bill 2469, Oregon's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. The toll-free Oregon legislative information line is 1-800-332-2313.

Message:

- ✓ Allowing children to continue receiving TANF benefits beyond the 60-month time limit is critical to meet the most basic needs of low-income children.
- ✓ Up-front screening and in-depth assessment of TANF clients ensures that families with barriers are identified and appropriately served early in the program.
- ✓ Letting families retain some child support while receiving TANF is fair and helps them succeed.

Take action with ease...

www.oregonfoodbank.org



ADVOCATE

Legislative Yellow Pages

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

Federal Legislative Contacts
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

Redesigning Oregon's TANF program

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program serves families with children that are in a financial crisis, providing a combination of financial assistance and support services. Many have criticized TANF for providing limited benefits, and for pushing vulnerable families into low wage work.

The federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 changed the nation's TANF program. Unless Oregon makes significant changes to its program, the state faces a loss of federal funds and federal fiscal penalties.

New legislation will affect approximately 18,000 Oregon households each

month, representing 41,000 people, including 30,000 children. Approximately 98% of TANF households have no income.

There are two bills this session addressing the new federal TANF requirements, House Bills 2180 and 2469. Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force is supportive of both bills. We believe HB 2469 is an effective tool for making changes to the program.

Based on recommendations by the Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCPP), House Bill 2469 offers the best starting point because it:

- Requires up-front, in-depth screening and assessment of every TANF

applicant so families can get the support and services they need.

- Creates a post-TANF employment retention program for those who are leaving TANF for low-wage employment. A small monthly grant would help families leaving TANF succeed in new jobs and ensure Oregon meets new work participation rates.
- Creates a TANF-SSI program that would provide assistance to those who may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This program will help disabled clients get assistance while they apply for SSI without hurting Oregon's new work participation requirements.

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Bridge program for disabled individuals

In the past, the general assistance (GA) program provided a small cash grant to disabled, childless adults who were in the process of applying for Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Income benefits (SSI/SSDI). However, the GA program was discontinued in 2005 leaving disabled Oregonians without the support needed to help them survive after an accident or illness that prevented them from working.

This session Oregon has an opportunity to create a

bridge program that will provide a monthly stipend to disabled adults, allowing them to provide for their basic needs while they navigate the SSI/SSDI application process, which often takes up to three years to complete.

Need for a bridge program

Oregon needs a bridge program because there is no means for income support. For example, to qualify for SSI/SSDI applicants must show they are disabled and can no longer work. Currently, most SSI/SSDI ap-

plicants are ineligible for unemployment insurance (UI) because UI requires participants to be able and available to work..

An SSI/SSDI application is a difficult process. More than 60 percent of claims are initially denied, so most applicants must go through the appeals process. An appeal can take an additional one to three years before a final decision is made. In Oregon, the average length of time from initial application to approval of benefits is 30

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Redesigning TANF

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- Gives parents of newborns an additional nine months exemption from work requirements, so parents with new babies have one year to become stable and focus on raising a healthy child before going back to work.
- Allows children to continue receiving TANF benefits beyond the 60-month time limit for adults.
- Restores the policy of allowing families to receive some child support while receiving TANF aid.
- Requires the State to more thoroughly evaluate families before sanctioning them.

Other TANF improvements that can be made in response to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 are:

- Increase the monthly grant amount and provide for an annual increase as the cost of living increases.
- Set the income eligibility limit at 200 percent of the

federal poverty level. The current income limit has been frozen since 1991.

- Expand access to the Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) program of the Oregon Health Plan, so all families leaving TANF will have health insurance.

For specific bill language see Web sites: <http://www.leg.state.or.us/07reg/measpdf/hb2400.dir/hb2469.intro.pdf>
<http://www.leg.state.or.us/07reg/measpdf/hb2100.dir/hb2180.intro.pdf>

For more information, see OCPP's HB 2469: The Best Starting Point for Redesigning Oregon's TANF Program
<http://www.ocpp.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?page=fact070207tanf1>.

See this month's 'take five'.

Time to start thinking of summer

Even though a chill hangs in the air it is already time to start planning for summer, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) that is. If you're wondering how you or your organization can aid in the fight against childhood hunger, this program is a great opportunity. While serving federally reimbursed meals to all youth ages 1-18, it provides the community an avenue to become involved on many levels. Know of a congregation, school or non-profit providing activities to kids during the summer? They could also be providing healthy, well-balanced meals for free. To participate as a sponsor of the SFSP, interested organizations must attend a training in early March, held by the Oregon Department of Education. For more information or to register, please contact Genna James at 503-947-5902 or genna.james@state.or.us.

There are also many opportunities for the community to support this program. Volunteer to play, supervise or serve the children at a nearby park. Encourage your school district to sponsor a site at every eligible school. Organize a fundraiser at your church or synagogue. Advocate for proposed federal changes that will expand the scope of the program and allow more youth to receive meals. For more information on how you can support this important program, please contact Annie Kirschner at 503-517-2099 or annie@oregonhunger.org.



Bridge program for individuals

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

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months. During this time, many applicants have no income.

Since the GA program ended, Oregonians who may be eligible to receive SSI/SSDI have been without assistance to maintain a home, eat regularly and pay for medical assistance for their disabilities.

Benefits to Oregonians

- Bridge program participants would work with program liaison, who know how to navigate the SSI/SSDI application process and expedite the appeals process.

- The bridge program would help obtain more federal resources for Oregonians, helping to ease the burden on state resources. Also, federal funds would provide additional economic stimulus in local communities where disabled individuals reside.
- The program is designed to bridge the time from application to award of benefits and is essentially a loan to the applicant. After approval the applicant receives a lump sum that is awarded retroactively to the application

date. This lump sum would be applied to the bridge program, supporting ongoing program sustainability.

Your support is important. Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and Oregon Association of Area Agencies on Aging and Disabilities (O4AD) have submitted bills recommending the funding of a bridge program for individuals. A hearing is being planned for all bills. Check the following Web site for updates, <http://www.oregonhunger.org/legislative-updates.html>.