



# ADVOCACY ALERT



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Oregon Food Bank  
Oregon Hunger Task Force

## Voice of hope among Oregon's hungry?

*"I'll believe it when I see it."* – Voices participant in Langlois

Every year, Oregon Food Bank staff travels across the state for the Voices project, a series of focus groups with emergency food recipients to talk about their experiences with hunger.

The 2008 Voices focus groups took place in the final weeks leading up to the November election. This timing offered a unique opportunity to hear how participants were faring in the midst of election-time excitement.

We were surprised to hear, so close to an emotionally charged election, that many Voices partici-

pants were not planning to vote. Though Oregon has one of the highest voter-registration rates in the nation, at more than 70 percent, the rate for food-pantry clients is significantly lower, at slightly more than 50 percent.

With all of the talk of hope and change, we wanted to know, "What does this mean to you?" The most common response was, "I'll believe it when I see it."

Participants spoke of the challenges they face as they stretch their budgets to put food on the table. They discussed rising unemployment, the high cost of housing and gas and the lack of affordable medical care among other factors

that contribute to food insecurity.

*"It's either buy food or take your medicine. It's a real hard choice, but you have to take the medicine. I do."* – Voices participant in Gaston

With change at the federal, state and local levels, we hope that this year elected officials will listen to the voices of all Oregonians, make decisions that benefit the least fortunate and give everyone something to believe in.

This year, the discussions took place at food pantries in five Oregon communities: Gaston, Madras, Sweet Home, Riddle and Langlois.

### take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

#### Message:

This year, the U.S. Congress will reauthorize federal nutrition programs—including WIC, school lunch and breakfast, child care and afterschool snacks and meals, and the summer food program. (You'll read much more about the reauthorization in upcoming issues of Advocacy Alert.) The first step for advocates of these important programs is to ensure that enough funds are allocated through the congressional budget process to make necessary improvements.

#### Action:

Call Senators Wyden and Merkley at (202) 225-3121. Encourage them, as members of the Senate Budget Committee, to designate adequate funds to child nutrition programs.

## Tax credits for low-income Oregonians

Your help is needed to make sure Oregonians know about valuable federal and state tax credits that are available to help them make ends meet. For example, for tax year 2008, households with two or more qualifying children may get up to \$4,824 from the earned income tax credit. Last year in Oregon more than \$370 million in earned income tax credits went to 200,000 households.

Tax credits make a tremendous impact, yet the IRS estimates that 25 percent of those eligible don't claim them. With your help we can put money in the hands of individuals and families to help them weather the economic crisis.

More than 150 IRS-sponsored AARP tax-aid sites in Oregon, including

more than 50 sites in the tri-county area, provide free tax preparation for



low- to moderate-income households. Visit the CASH (Creating Assets, Savings & Hope) Oregon Web site at [www.cashoregon.org](http://www.cashoregon.org)

to locate a free tax site in Multnomah, Washington or Clackamas counties, or visit [www.aarp.org/taxaide](http://www.aarp.org/taxaide) for all sites in Oregon.

*Get Money Back from Your Taxes* brochures and posters are available in English and Spanish to help you get the word out. For a full listing of materials and resources visit [www.cashoregon.org/pubs.htm](http://www.cashoregon.org/pubs.htm), or contact CASH Oregon at 503.243.7765 or [info@cashoregon.org](mailto:info@cashoregon.org).

(cont. on second page)

## A step forward for individuals with disabilities

For the past several months, Oregon Food Bank and the Oregon Hunger Task Force have been working with a broad coalition to restore Oregon's General Assistance (GA) Program. This program would provide critical cash grants to very low-income individuals with disabilities who are applying for federal Supplemental Security Income and/or Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI). The grants of \$314 per month would help cover basic survival needs like housing, toilet paper and soap. Participants would also receive medical assistance through the Oregon Health Plan (OHP).

The coalition took an important step forward on

February 11<sup>th</sup> when the Oregon House Human Services Committee held a public hearing on HB 2051, the bill to restore GA. Multiple organizations, private citizens and previous GA clients testified in support of the program. Participants discussed the moral need to take care of our most vulnerable citizens and highlighted the economic stimulus impact on local businesses that would be provided through the cash grants. In addition to these benefits, the program would be largely self-sustaining as more than 70 percent of the program costs would be reimbursed by the federal government once disability benefits are awarded.

Committee chair Rep. Tomei appointed a bipartisan workgroup comprised of Reps. Dembrow and Freeman to look at the bill and possible amendments. If the bill passes out of the Human Services Committee it will be referred to Ways and Means.

If you would like to learn more about this program or join the coalition, visit:

[http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/research\\_and\\_action/legislative\\_update/](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/research_and_action/legislative_update/)



## Boost to food assistance

On February 17, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The act provides significant new funding to help address the increased demand for emergency food assistance in Oregon. Senators Wyden and Merkley along with Reps. Blumenauer, Schrader, and Wu voted in favor of the legislation. The package includes a 13 percent increase in supplemental nutrition assistance (food stamp benefits) and enough additional funding to The Emergency Food Assistance Program to provide the Oregon Food Bank Network with roughly 60 truckloads of USDA commodities.

your Web site during the tax season

- \* Share this information with other organizations in your community.

CASH Oregon has sample wording that you can use for a Web site posting or to include in newsletter articles. CASH Oregon is also available to come to your organization to present more information. Contact Jim Harper at 503.243.7765 or [jharper@cashoregon.org](mailto:jharper@cashoregon.org) for more information and to answer your questions.

Thank you in advance for your efforts to get this information to the people who need it most.

## Valuable tax credits (cont. from front page)

There are many ways you can help community members claim the credits they deserve:

- \* Incorporate tax credit information into your regular communications. Publish articles in your newsletters, send materials along with other mailings you may be doing, display posters and distribute flyers.
- \* Inform your employees about tax credits and ask them to get the word out to others.
- \* Volunteer or recruit volunteers and translators to help at free tax-preparation sites.
- \* Provide a link to [www.cashoregon.org](http://www.cashoregon.org) on

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### Legislative Yellow Pages

#### State Legislative Information

1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem) 503-986-1000 (in Salem)

<http://www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide/>

#### Federal Legislative Contacts

Senator Merkley  
(503)326-3386

Senator Wyden  
(503) 326-7525

Rep. Wu (District 1)  
(503) 326-2901

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