



ADVOCACY ALERT



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Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Hunger Task Force

Helping working families and communities thrive

Oregon's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) provides support for hard-working families whose low wages leave them struggling to afford basic necessities and to get ahead. Oregonians for Working Families, a coalition including Oregon Food Bank and the Oregon Hunger Task Force, is advocating that the state expand its EITC. The reward for work should be a path out of poverty, an expansion of opportunity for workers and their children.

the nation. Most states, in fact, do not tax below-poverty wages.

Expanding Oregon's EITC is a simple way to make our tax system fairer. Increasing the EITC would cut taxes for about 200,000 Oregon households, one in seven households in the state. It is a simple and effective way to target tax relief to working families, especially those with children.



The Oregon EITC piggybacks on the federal EITC. Increasing the state EITC from its current 6 percent of the federal credit to 18 percent would supplement the earnings of the aver-

Oregon's current tax system is unfair to low-wage working families. Oregon's income tax on the poor and near poor is among the highest in

age EITC household by about \$180. For a family of four living at the poverty line, it will mean about \$480 more per year.

Lifting Oregon's EITC rate to 18 percent would move our state from near the bottom to the middle of the pack among states that offer earned income tax credits. Nearly all the benefit of the EITC goes to working families with children and research suggests that most EITC dollars are spent quickly and locally.

In Oregon we believe that hard-working families should be able to pay the rent, buy food and other necessities and have the oppor-

(cont. on second page)

take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Message:

Ballot measure madness

Ballot measure madness may sound like a game show, but it's much more serious than that... with all due respect to game-show fans.

Please take five minutes this month to make sure you vote your entire ballot. With so much focus on the presidential election and a few other top-of-the-ticket campaigns, some folks may not be aware of other very important issues on this November's ballot.

For example, Oregonians will vote on 12 statewide ballot measures this year, including several that would have drastic implications on human services programs. Many, many organizations have expressed deep concern about ballot measures' cost and their maddening effect on state services.

Oregon Food Bank urges you to vote no on measures 64 and 59.

Action:

During the coming days, while you're sitting around your kitchen table with your Oregon Voters' Pamphlet and number-two pencil in hand, please take five and complete your full ballot because this year's ballot measure madness is not a game.

So you want to make a difference?

Nancy Amidei is an enthusiastic and engaging advocate who directed the Civic Engagement Project at the University of Washington School of Social Work. She also wrote the book, *So You Want to Make a Difference*. Recently she spoke at the Oregon Housing and Community Services conference and challenged advocates to ask some key questions of themselves and others:

- Does your doctor or dentist accept Medicaid? If not, engage them in a conversation about this.
- Ask the businesses you patronize if the people they employ earn a living wage and have access to health-care coverage. If they don't, consider taking your business elsewhere. If they do, make sure to acknowledge them, in public if possible.
- Does everyone you work with or employ

earn a living wage or have access to health care? If not, what can you do about it?

- When your organization or business gives raises, instead of giving the same percentage increase to everyone, consider giving a higher amount to low-wage workers to help them get ahead.

Nancy is a strong believer in participatory democracy and civic engagement, and that each person's voice

can make a significant difference. Nancy was recently awarded the University of Washington's Outstanding Public Service Award. For more info:

www.uwnews.org

Helping families and communities

tunity to get ahead. An expanded EITC would help hard-working families thrive.

Restoring Oregon's General Assistance (GA) program would be another important step toward thriving communities ...because all Oregonians with disabilities should have access to food, shelter, and medical care.

Oregon currently has no safety net for childless individuals with disabilities as they maneuver the Supplemental Security Income and/or Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) applications process. GA was eliminated in 2005, it left thousands of Oregonians without any type of income.

Applying for federal benefits is a lengthy and complicated process. With an average wait time of 30 months and an initial denial rate of 60 percent, many applicants become homeless in the meantime, or end up in jails, shelters, and emergency rooms. Some die.

Often referred to as a bridge program, GA would provide a temporary monthly cash grant to individuals with disabilities who are applying for SSI/SSDI benefits. This small stipend partially covers basic living necessities like food and shelter and participants can get access to health coverage through the Oregon Health Plan.

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Nearly 70 percent of the state's costs would be reimbursed by the federal government once SSI/SSDI benefits are awarded, making it a cost-effective and sustainable program.

Oregon Food Bank is the lead convener of a growing coalition of organizations and individuals working to restore the state's GA program.

To learn more about GA and to join our list of supporters, please click on http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/research_and_action/legislative_update/ or call Stephanie Tama-Sweet at 503-282-0555, Ext. 243.

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Oregon food stamp participation

In 2007, the Food Stamp Program provided critical support to more than 438,000 Oregonians who struggled to obtain a nutritious diet each month. Food stamps also provided vital assistance to Oregonians impacted by winter storms in 2007, and have been particularly important as rising food prices put increasing pressure on Oregon households. Food stamps also act as an economic stimulus to communities across the state, pumping more than \$487 million in federal dollars directly into local economies.

The recently released 2007 Food Stamp Report provides information on food stamps in Oregon and shows participation rates by county. It also shows the lost value of food stamps when eligible people don't get this vital assistance. To view the report, go to www.oregonhunger.org or call 503-595-6062.

This report was jointly produced by the Oregon Hunger Task Force and Oregon Food Bank.

Connecting medical providers with hunger issues

Hunger isn't just uncomfortable for children. It's dangerous. Children who are hungry have more trouble learning in school and are at higher risk for irreversible health problems later in life. Health-care providers can play a key role in addressing childhood hunger.

The Childhood Hunger Initiative of Oregon is pleased to announce the online course: **Childhood Food Insecurity: Health Impacts, Screening and Intervention.** <http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/hunger>

knowledge of the health consequences of childhood hunger, gain skills for addressing this topic in a clinical setting, and learn intervention strategies for patients and families at risk. Upon completion of the course, eligible participants will receive one continuing education credit *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit*TM.

This course is supported through generous funding from the Oregon Department of Human Services and by Oregon State University Extension Service.

Ask your health-care providers if they have taken the course.

Through this course, providers will improve their

