



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

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take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Contact your state representative and demand that they protect low-income programs in the 2003-05 budget.

Message:

- ✓ Human service programs must be adequately funded – it is time to find the money to meet the need.
- ✓ We cannot address hunger with a broken safety net.
- ✓ Basic health and human services have fallen below acceptable levels.

Background:

See article on page 2.



Your check is in the mail - unless you are one of the 6.5 million families who have been left behind

Despite promises by the administration and party leaders to help the 12 million children from low-income working families who were left out of the recently increased child tax credit, Congress left for their August recess before reaching a compromise on legislation to extend the tax credit to low-income working families.

In an attempt to reconcile the two bills, the Senate offered a compromise to the House-passed version. The House bill included \$46.5 billion in tax credits for wealthier families and a mere \$3.5 billion for low-

income families. The Senate compromise includes almost \$11 billion in new tax cuts to families with incomes over \$110,000 and the same \$3.5 billion tax credit for poor families.

Here is a comparison of the tax credit for families at each end of the income ladder. Both scenarios assume a married couple with 2 children.

| Family Income | Proposed child tax credit increase |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| \$ 20,000 | \$ 475 |
| \$150,000 | \$2,000 |

The Senate compromise is no solution. Because Con-

gress insists on including additional benefits for wealthy families, the bill would add \$50 billion to the deficit, putting additional pressure on Congress to cut spending. Given the lack of political clout low-income families have in Washington DC, the likely result of increasing the deficit would be a decrease in funding for low-income programs.

For more information visit Children's Defense Fund www.cdfactioncouncil.org

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
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
Senator Smith
(503) 326-3386
Senator Wyden
(503) 326-7525

Child Nutrition Reauthorization: Are children really stealing lunches from the government?

The allegation that almost \$1 billion worth of free and reduced cost school meals are going to ineligible children is driving the childhood nutrition reauthorization debate. However, as we reported in the February *Advocacy Alert*, research behind the allegation of abuse is inconclusive, while research regarding the impact of over-certification is sobering – quadrupling the certification requirements will result in a drastic reduction in the number of *eligible* children served.

No new money

Cracking down on the purported abuse is one of the

primary means for bringing “new money” to the program. Congressional leaders involved in the child nutrition reauthorization debate assert that, due to the growing deficit, new investments in child nutrition will have to come from savings gained by removing “ineligible” children from the program. In other words, any investment in child nutrition will have to be squeezed from families currently participating in the program. Children’s advocates are concerned about the impact this will have on participation for eligible children. It is worth noting that a Senate proposal designed to save

\$25 billion by closing illicit corporate tax shelters was removed from the final \$350 billion tax package. Apparently the idea of cracking down on corporate abuse is not as politically appealing as chasing down school children.

Potential impact

Currently, 3% of program applicants are required to submit additional verification. The proposal being considered calls for increasing that number to 12%. Past experience reveals that increasing verification requirements will inevitably

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How to contact your state legislators

Don't know who your state senator or representative is? You know who they are, but don't know how to contact them? Here's how:

By phone:

1-800-332-2313 (toll free, outside Salem) or (503) 986-1000 (in Salem)

On the web: Go to the "Citizen's Guide to the Oregon Legislative Process" at www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide and click on "Find Your Legislator."

As the budget process drags on, funding levels for human services remain woefully inadequate

Yes, we are still talking about the state budget. Legislators have not reached a compromise on the 2003-05 budget. Speaker of the House Karen Minnis has pulled out of bi-partisan negotiations and has taken the House out of the Joint Ways and Means committee, further frustrating an already protracted budget debate. Human service advocates were recently told that legislators have not been hearing from constituents about the cuts to the human service budgets, leading many to believe that the public was satisfied with the level of funding outlined in current budget proposals. We need to make it clear to all of our legislators that we

are not satisfied. The funding level for human services is inadequate.

The estimates below highlight additional funding that must be added to protect the integrity of important low-income programs (the co-chairs' budget is the benchmark used for these estimates).

Oregon Health Plan

The funding woes of the Oregon Health Plan are another important element of the budget. Legislators miscalculated the 'savings' from a proposal made earlier this year. As a result, legislators must either come up with additional revenue or deny coverage to

75,000 -95,000 low-income adults. Program cuts and premium increases have already reduced coverage of 35,000 people. Denying coverage is not the answer - legislators must find the money to provide medical care to the most vulnerable Oregonians.

Silence is Deadly

Legislators claim they have stopped receiving calls and letters about the budget. Contact your legislator and ask them to carry your message to members of the House Special Committee on Budget, Senate President Peter Courtney and the Governor. See this month's "take five".

| Program | Impact of cut | Additional Funding Needs |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Employment related day care/ Student day care | Co-pays increased, putting low-income working families at increased risk. Maximum co-pay to increase from \$25 to \$43, eligibility limit decreased to 150% FPL from 185% FPL. | \$13.9 M |
| TANF/JOBS/Support services | TANF grant decreased by as much as \$15/month. Decrease in employment related support. | \$14.5 M |
| Food Stamps | Increased caseload. Money needed to restore staffing levels with aim of reaching caseload ratio of to 250 to 1. | \$11 M |

Child Nutrition Reauthorization *(continued from page 1)*

lead to an increase in the number of eligible children removed from the program. Whether the high non-response rate is a result of families not understanding the request, not wanting to share personal financial information with community members, or simply not complying, the net result for Oregon, is that nearly 4,000 eligible children would lose access to free and reduced-price lunches.

What's missing?

Reauthorization is the opportunity to thoroughly review a program and discuss how outcomes may be improved. Considering the number of low-income children who are not accessing school-based nutrition programs, our number one goal should be looking at ways to remove barriers and improve nutrition for school aged children. Improving compliance and program oversight is an important goal but it should not be accomplished at the expense of eligible children.

Next steps

Congress will pick up this debate as they return from its August recess. Contact your congressional representatives and urge them to invest in child nutrition without needlessly putting low-income children at further risk. For more information, including estimated impact on children in other Western states, visit the Western Region Anti-Hunger Consortium website, www.wrahc.org.

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

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