



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

March 2003
Volume 9 Issue 5



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Call, write, or email Senators Wyden and Smith and ask them to support a Senate TANF Reauthorization package that truly addresses the needs of low-income families:

- Retain the current work requirement of 30 hours a week for adult recipients
- Expand education and training opportunities for TANF recipients
- Allow states to waive or extend time limits for people who face insurmountable barriers to employment
- Provide significant increased funding for child care for low-income families.

See article on page 2 for more information.

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

President's 2004 budget proposes to greatly shrink federal safety net at expense to states

According to USDA, *Oregon has the highest food insecurity with hunger rate in the nation.* Oregon also has one of the highest unemployment rates among the 50 states. With the state's budget in severe deficit, Oregon Food Bank is concerned that changes to federal programs serving poor and low-income Oregonians proposed in the President's 2004 Budget will exacerbate the state's problems with hunger and economic insecurity. Please contact your Representative and Senators to express your concern over the shrinking federal safety net contained in the President's 2004 Budget.

• Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Child Nutrition Programs include School Breakfast and Lunch, Summer Food, the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program. The President's 2004 Budget proposes two major—and disappointing—items for child nutrition reauthorization: 1) no new funding, and 2) a requirement of income verification for all children participating in school meals, instead of the current audits of some children. USDA's own analysis shows that the only discrepancy they're finding is that too many low-income children are getting a free lunch who should be getting a reduced price lunch—this is the difference among families earning 130% of the Federal Poverty and 185% of the Federal Poverty Level. This relatively minor problem hardly justifies the increase in paperwork for all kids and schools, particularly in Oregon where

families AND schools are facing severe economic pressures. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) estimates that close to one million children *who are eligible* for the program will drop off due to these increased verification requirements. *Oregon Food Bank and the Hunger Relief Task Force urge our Congressional Delegation to support increased funding for child nutrition programs and to block attempts to increase verification requirements that will tie up low-income families and schools in red tape.*

• TANF Reauthorization

TANF is the last remaining income safety net for poor children and their parents when families exhaust unemployment benefits and personal savings. With such high unemployment and hunger in Oregon, the TANF Reauthorization bill recently passed by the House threatens to completely destabilize the TANF program in Oregon. Under the House provisions, Oregon would lose its current TANF waiver (set to expire in June 2003), and the bill would impose a five-year time limit and a stricter 40-hour-per-week work requirement that must be met through work or workfare, without adequate child care resources. Current job search and other activities Oregon's program uses to help families stabilize so they can return to the workforce would no longer count. Advocates are concerned that this push to move people quickly into low-wage work (work that may or may not be available) will undermine recent efforts to get families the additional benefits they need such as food stamps and the

Oregon Health Plan. *We urge our Congressional Delegation to support provisions similar to those in last year's Senate TANF Reauthorization bill, which include the flexibility needed for TANF families in Oregon.*

Potential Block Grants of important Federal Safety Net Programs:

• **Food Stamps:** The President's budget contains a provision, called "Ticket to Independence," that provides states with "superwaiver" authority to consolidate the Food Stamp Program with other programs, with few or no provisions for low-income people. *We urge our Congressional Delegation to maintain the Food Stamp Program structure reaffirmed in last year's bipartisan reauthorization of the program through the Farm Bill.*

• Medicaid

The Bush Administration recently offered states an impossible choice: get some immediate fiscal relief (\$12.7 billion over 7 years) and accept a Medicaid block grant that would eliminate the entitlement for beneficiaries—or continue Medicaid as it is without any fiscal relief. The "fiscal relief" offered by the Administration would be temporary—states must pay back the amount in later years. *We urge our Congressional Delegation to support provisions similar to S.138, which would provide an increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP).*

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House passes strict TANF bill

The House of Representatives passed HR 4, the TANF (welfare) Reauthorization bill, which is nearly identical to a plan put forth by President Bush.

HR 4 requires states to have 70 percent of people on welfare working 40 hours a week by 2007, with a strict definition of work. Current state waivers, such as Oregon's, which have broader definitions of work, were not renewed. HR 4 limits people to five years of benefits over their lifetime and bans legal immigrants from aid programs. Only a small amount of increased child care funding was included in HR 4.

The bill now moves to the Senate, where some adjustments will likely be made. It is critical to **contact Senators now** (Senator Gordon Smith sits on the Senate Finance committee where this bill will go) and voice opposition to HR 4. *See Take 5 (page 1).*

Hunger legislation moves ahead amidst continuing state budget challenges

Three small pieces of state legislation were introduced as a first step in addressing the state's hunger problem, particularly in the summer months. A bi-partisan group of legislators introduced the package of bills at a press conference February 24 to mark Hunger Awareness Week in the State Legislature.

•**SB 287**, cosponsored by Senator Ryan Deckert and Rep. Tim Knopp, would phase in a requirement that school districts with high hunger rates provide sites for summer food service meals, or ensure that other qualified groups offer meals where hunger is high.

•**SB 500**, cosponsored by Senator Frank Shields, Rep. Dave Hunt, and Rep. Bruce Starr, would provide a state match that enables recipients of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program to receive coupons redeemable

for fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers' markets.

•**SB 501**, cosponsored by Shields, Starr, and Rep. Jackie Dingfelder, would provide state support to a coupon program that enables seniors to obtain fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers' markets and certified roadside stands.

All three bills include very modest amounts of money, but would leverage more federal funds to provide nutritious food to children and senior citizens during the coming summer months.

SB 287, the summer food bill, passed the Senate floor on February 27 and now moves to the House Education Committee. SB 500 and 501 are scheduled for hearings in the Senate Agriculture Committee the first week of March.

"This Legislature should make hunger a top priority," said Rep. Dingfelder. "Ore-

gon suffers the dubious distinction of having the highest hunger rate of any state in the nation. We must address the short-term needs of hungry Oregonians and work toward a long-term solution that prevents this problem from ever happening again."

Governor challenges public

On February 27, Governor Kulongoski called together a meeting of public officials, business leaders and advocates to begin the discussion of how to address Oregon's high hunger rate. The meeting was a good first step but was held against the backdrop of a bleak March revenue forecast for the remainder of the 2001-03 biennium.

"If we can concentrate on maximizing those federal dollars," said Patti Whitney-Wise of the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, "we might begin to make some headway."

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

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President's 2004 budget *continued from page one*

A companion bill is to be introduced soon in the House by Representatives King (R-NY) and Brown (D-OH). With the state's current fiscal deficit, the Oregon Health Plan (Oregon's version of Medicaid) is in crisis and needs immediate federal fiscal relief, not a block grant with diminished funding.

•Section 8 Housing Program

The President's 2004 budget decreased by 0.8 percent funding for HUD, and also proposes to change the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program into a block grant to the states. Re-named

Housing Assistance to Needy Families (HANF), the block grant is intended to encourage states to better coordinate with TANF, the time-limited welfare program. Most states are in fiscal crisis, Oregon's situation being about the worst. With wider latitude, states would undoubtedly make changes that alter current distribution patterns. It is unclear how many, if any, incremental vouchers (beyond the number currently available) could be funded. Currently, the Section 8 voucher program is one of the most poverty-targeted programs—75 percent of the assistance

must go to families with incomes at or below 30 percent of area median income (AMI). ***We urge our Congressional Delegation to keep the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program a federally run program and to make increased funding for safe, decent, accessible and affordable housing for low-income families a priority.***

For more information, please contact Kim Thomas, public policy manager at Oregon Food Bank, (503) 282-0555, x206 or email at kthomas@oregonfoodbank.org.