



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

November 2002
Volume 9 Issue 1



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action: Call your U.S. Senators and Representative and let them know you support a three-year extension of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), including extending Oregon's waiver through 2005.

Message:

- TANF is a critical safety net program for very low-income families in Oregon.
- We need Oregon's TANF waiver to continue as long as possible until there is a better reauthorization package.
- Oregon's waiver provides a more humane approach to what counts as work, as people struggle to find jobs in a tough economy.

See story 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

Voters to decide fate of state services on January 28

Tax increase is pay-as-you-go solution to state budget crisis

On January 28, 2003, Oregon voters will decide the fate of a three-year temporary income tax increase that will raise the \$313 million needed to stabilize the state budget this biennium and avoid more huge cuts to essential state services.

Measure 28, the temporary tax increase plan, was referred to the voters by the State Legislature during the Fifth Special Session in September. It was part of the final budget-balancing package that included additional borrowing and additional cuts.

State budget crisis continues

Oregon, like many other states, has been hard hit by declining tax revenues resulting from the economic recession gripping the country. The state's budget deficit since the 2001-03 biennium began is \$1.7 billion. After five special sessions and lots of proposals (some good, some bad), the Governor and the State Legislature have managed to balance the budget by a combination of cuts, borrowing, one-time fixes, and tax increases.

Measure 28 is part of the plan to generate new revenues by modest tax increases. If it does not pass in January, major program cuts will take effect February 1st. It is also likely that the December revenue forecast will not be bright, so the state is clearly not out of the woods even if Measure 28 passes. But,

without Measure 28, the state will slash state services – including K-12 education, higher education, public safety, and human services – in order to balance the budget.

What is Measure 28?

Measure 28 is all about pay-as-you-go, sustainable budgeting to make sure state government is able to provide for its citizens during this difficult economic period. The ballot measure raises the top personal income tax bracket by 0.5 percent for three years (tax years 2002 through 2004). It also raises the corporate income tax by 0.33 percent.

What will it cost the typical taxpayer?

The majority of typical Oregon taxpayers will pay an average of \$3 more per month in income taxes. Many typical *elderly* taxpayers will not see an increase in their overall income tax bills. For more on who will pay what, see the information put together by the Oregon Center for Public Policy at www.ocpp.org.

What's at stake if we don't pass Measure 28?

The state has already begun the necessary paperwork to make deep cuts to public services on February 1st if the measure fails at the polls. These cuts include:

- K-12 public schools (State School Fund), \$95 mil-

lion — this means cutting weeks off the school year in many communities.

- Universities and community colleges, \$41 million — this means higher tuitions at schools already out of the reach of many and less access to economic opportunity.
- Health care and human services, \$90 million — this means less help for our state's most vulnerable citizens — seniors, the disabled, children, and working poor families.
- Public safety and prisons, \$55 million — this means closing prisons, less state troopers on the road, and less support for the juvenile justice system.

As more detailed lists of the cuts become available, it will become clear that these cuts will negatively impact every Oregonian in every part of the state. For an extra \$3 a month in taxes, this pain can be avoided.

Looking towards the future

The state will still have a budget deficit when the 2003 Legislative Session gets underway in mid-January.

Measure 28 will provide enough revenue to enable legislators to start the session in a position to discuss tax reform and other big issues. Legislators need this breathing room to craft some long-term solutions and do what's best for Oregon's future.

TANF Reauthorization: Major changes not likely this year

Congress returns to work from its election recess on November 12. Many issues remain on the table, including almost all of the annual appropriations bills and Homeland Security legislation; thus, it is unlikely that we will see a sweeping reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program this year.

Before recessing, Congress passed continuing resolutions that allowed TANF to continue through December 31. Now lawmakers are working hard to hammer out a compromise that will make minor changes in this critical safety net program while postponing major debate and reforms for another three years.

A three-year extension of TANF will be good if it includes a continuation of Oregon's waiver. *See the "Take Five" action on page one for how you can help.*

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

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Parents as Scholars: ending hunger through more educational opportunities for low-income families

Oregon is faced with the double whammy of high unemployment and the highest level of hunger in the country. When asked what would help them not be hungry, emergency food box recipients often talk about better-paying jobs and access to more education and training.

Starting a Parents as Scholars program in Oregon would be one proven way to help struggling families get a leg up and out of poverty.

Education and training: the ladder out of poverty

According to a 2001 study by the University of Oregon, 84% of people leaving welfare for work desired more education and training to help them pursue higher-paying jobs.

Yet Oregon's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program requires people to move as quickly as possible into employment with only a few months of short-term training allowed. As a result, families tend to fall back onto TANF as low-wage jobs disintegrate, trapping them in a cycle of welfare and poverty.

Maine program: breaking the cycle

A promising program, originating in the state of Maine, is a model Oregon could adopt during the next legislative session. The Parents as Scholars (PAS) program allows qualified low-income parents the option of pursuing higher education without losing their TANF benefits by having education count as a work activity.

The Maine program, begun in 1997, has shown promising results:

- PAS graduates earn a median wage of almost \$12 per hour after graduating, compared to a median of \$8 per hour prior to entering college.
- PAS graduates are more likely to be offered sound benefits packages (health insurance, paid sick leave, paid vacation time) than welfare leavers without a degree.
- Nearly 90 percent of working graduates have already left TANF and indicators are strong that they have left welfare permanently.

Parents as Scholars in Oregon: now IS the time!

The PAS program won't be for everyone. Candidates for PAS will need to be accepted for admission to an educational institution or training curriculum before entering the program. They will need to put all the pieces together to finance their tuition (through grants, loans, etc.).

In return, PAS would provide a monthly cash grant and support services to help the TANF-eligible family financially while the parent attains more in-depth training or a college degree.

Recent polling conducted for the Oregon Center for Public Policy shows that Oregonians overwhelmingly support allowing TANF recipients to pursue more in-depth training and education to move them permanently out of poverty (see www.ocpp.org for more information).

The Oregon Food Bank Statewide Network of Regional Food Banks has made Parents as Scholars one of its top legislative priorities for 2003. Many local emergency food providers have expressed

interest in the program as well. All see PAS as a program offering a viable solution to the root causes of poverty and hunger.

A Parents as Scholars bill was introduced during the last legislative session by Representative Deborah Kafoury (D-Portland), but it was never assigned to a committee or given a hearing. During the interim, Oregon Food Bank has been working closely with Rep. Kafoury to submit a new bill for the 2003 session. We have also begun building grassroots support for the bill.

If you are interested in joining the coalition supporting the Parents as Scholars bill during the upcoming state legislative session (which includes an email listserv), or if you would like to find out more about the program, contact Cassandra Garrison at Oregon Food Bank, cgarrison@oregonfoodbank.org or (503) 282-0555 x 210.

Feed children in after-school programs

The federal After-School Snack and Meal Program provides reimbursement for snacks and meals served by school-based or nonprofit after-school programs that are in areas where 50 percent or more of children receive free and reduced-price school meals. This is a great way to support after-school programs and make sure children don't go hungry.

To get new information fliers to distribute in your community, contact **Holly Wilkalis, (503) 963-2292** or holly.wilkalis@hcs.state.or.us.