



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

September 2003
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take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Call, write, or email a big 'thank you' to the legislators who helped pass all but one of the anti-hunger bills.

Message:

Despite the long, rocky road to adjournment, there has been some good work that should be recognized. There was only one 'Nay' vote on all of the anti-hunger bills – so it is safe to say that your legislator deserves thanks for their vote.

To find out how your legislator voted on specific legislation, go to <http://www.leg.state.or.us/billsset.htm> and search for the bill number.

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

Thinking outside the lunch box



On October 17, 2003, the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force will be hosting

a one-day conference, "Thinking Outside the Lunch Box," for current and prospective Summer Food Program sponsors in Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties. Other community partners interested in supporting the program are also welcome to attend. The workshops will focus on innovative ways of using the Summer Food Service Program to feed hungry children during the summer months. For more information on the conference, please call Holly Wilkalis at (503) 963-2292.

In the meantime, child nutrition reauthorization is still working its way through Congress. Mem-

bers will be taking this issue up as early as September when they return from summer recess. Interesting proposals to keep an eye on:

- A USDA proposal that would create one streamlined program encompassing school year, summertime, and after-school feeding programs for school sponsors.
- The Lugar waiver, which would simplify the program rules for schools and non-profit summer food sponsors and allow the higher summer food reimbursement rate.

Both of these proposals would do a great deal to make the program easier to run, be more responsive to community needs, and could help us serve more children here in Oregon. Congress has also shown some interest lately in removing the reduced-price

category for school meals, allowing schools to feed all children under 185% of the federal poverty line for free.

However, some House and Senate members may still be contemplating the Administration's request to quadruple the number of households required to provide income documentation. This puts pressure on school districts already struggling to comply with other federal mandates and erects unnecessary barriers to working-poor families. The USDA's own research shows that increasing paperwork for needy schoolchildren will push many eligible children out of the free and reduced-price school meal programs. Because these proposals could negatively impact children's ability to access school meals, advocates across the country will continue to monitor this issue closely.

Patterns of poverty: New U.S. census study points to the episodic nature of poverty

A new report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau describes the results of a four-year study examining how an individual experiences poverty over time. Most studies on poverty take a one-time look at the statistics or measure poverty based on annual income. Findings from this report, however, suggest that annual statistics do not capture the actual experi-

ence of individuals and families who face poverty.

The study points out that a relatively high number of people experience poverty for short periods of time. Between 1996 and 1999, 34.2% of the U.S. population was poor for at least two months. In 1999 alone, nearly 34.8 million people were poor in any given month. The episodic

poverty rate for that year, measured as the percent of people who were poor for at least two months, was 19.5%. Compare that to the annual poverty rate for 1999, which was 10.1%.

This study sheds some light on one of the problems with the Administration's assertion that a large number of ineligible

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Patterns of Poverty

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children are receiving free and reduced-price school meals. The USDA study being used to defend the proposal to quadruple the number of working-poor families required to provide additional documentation compares *annual poverty* rates against the number of children certified to receive free and reduced-price meals based on *monthly income*. As this new U.S. Census study confirms, more people slip into poverty for short periods of time versus remain poor for an entire calendar year. The difference may seem academic until you consider the children who depend on free and reduced-priced meals during the few months their families experience poverty.

The report, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being, Poverty 1996-1999* by John Iceland, can be found at www.census.gov.

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

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2003 Legislative wrap-up: budget, revenue, hunger bills, and more to come

Finally! The 2003 legislative session is all but over. The last few weeks of August were a flurry of activity, which ended with a mix of success.

Human Services Budget

On August 23, the House passed the Senate-approved Human Services budget which, while far from perfect, represents the highest level of funding low-income advocates could hope for at this moment. It included additional revenue (\$55 million above the House-passed version) for many vital social services. Highlights from the bill include partial restoration of funding for General Assistance, Employment Related Day Care, Student Related Day Care, Oregon Health Plan Standard, plus in-home care for the Seniors and People with Disabilities program. For more information visit <http://www.dhs.state.or.us/aboutdhs/budget/>

Revenue Package

As we are all well aware of by now, social services, schools, and other public services have suffered terribly throughout the last two budget periods. During the 2003-05 budget period alone, the state has suffered a \$2.6 billion loss in revenues. Lost revenue translated into lost social services and a decline in the quality of life for too many Oregonians.

The revenue bill, passed by a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats, is a temporary solution for

closing the budget gap and funding a basic level of important social service programs. The centerpiece of the package is a three-year income tax surcharge called a "temporary graduated income tax assessment." In addition, the bill raises revenue through increased business taxes and a reduction in certain tax credits.

This revenue package is a fair and balanced solution to repairing some of the damage the recession has inflicted on Oregon families and individuals. On average, Oregon taxpayers will pay an additional \$3 per month over the next three years. When the effect of the federal tax cuts is considered, the tax burden for all individuals will be lower. The benefit of this temporary increase is that the vast majority of Oregonians will have better lives as a result of better-funded public services.

Anti-Hunger Bills

The flurry of last minute activity included passage of the Farmers' Market bills, SB 500 & SB 501. Together, these bills will provide just under \$100,000 in general fund money and leverage additional federal dollars to support increasing access to fresh, healthy produce for low-income women, children, and seniors. For information about these programs visit: <http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/wic/about.cfm> Overall, the session was a success in terms of our legislative agenda. Four of the five bills on our legislative agenda passed. In addition

to the Farmers' Market bills (SB 500 & 501), both the Summer Food bill (SB 287) and Parents as Scholars (HB 2450) have already been signed into law. A warm "thank you" goes out to all of the leaders down in Salem, partner organizations throughout the state, and citizen advocates like you. Everyone played an important role in the process of turning these bills into laws during an extremely challenging legislative session.

Looking Ahead

Policy makers, community leaders, and voters are far from done with the task of addressing Oregon's revenue and budget challenges. Legislators will likely be called back for a special session in 2004 to address long-term tax reform proposals. More immediately, efforts are underway by those opposed to the legislature's bi-partisan revenue package to force a special election. We will continue to be a part of the tax reform discussion, working toward a long-term solution that will provide adequate funds for public services, distribute the burden fairly based on ability to pay, and provide for the stability to endure future economic downturns.

Did you know...

7.2 million working Americans are living in poverty.
56% of them live in families with children.

U.S Department of Labor