



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

May 2002
Volume 8 Issue 7



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action: Call your U.S. Representative and Senators and ask them to support the "Working from Poverty to Promise Act of 2002" (H.R. 4210). *Please see story on welfare this page for details.*

Message:

- Please support the proposals contained in H.R. 4210.
- Welfare reauthorization must focus on providing resources and opportunities to help families get out of poverty.
- More education and training opportunities will help poor families achieve long-term self-sufficiency.

More information: Bread for the World, www.bread.org.

Legislative Yellow Pages

State Legislative Information
1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem)
(503) 986-1000 (in Salem)
www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide

Governor Kitzhaber
(503) 378-4582 (24 hours)

U.S. Capitol Switchboard
(202) 224-3121

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

Welfare reauthorization moving quickly; Congress needs to hear from you!

The federal reauthorization of the nation's welfare program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), is quickly moving through Congress. Many important issues are at stake, and the outcome of these deliberations will have a profound impact on Oregon's poor families.

Life after welfare reform

Prior to federal welfare reform in 1996, cash welfare served as the nation's income safety net for poor families with children who had no or very little income. The goal was to protect children from the harmful effects of poverty.

The 1996 welfare law changed the focus of welfare from ameliorating poverty to requiring work. The program was changed from a federal entitlement to state block grants, and thousands of low-income parents moved off welfare and into work.

The economy of the late 1990s provided the biggest incentive for parents to move off the welfare roles. Plenty of jobs, particularly low-wage jobs, were available, and most parents wanted very much to work. But the number of poor Oregonians did not decrease, despite low unemployment and a strong economy.

What have we learned since 1996? We've learned that work alone does not move families out of poverty, and when the economy hits a recession, the safety net is full of gaping holes.

More work the answer?

As TANF reauthorization discussions get underway, some members of Congress, following the lead of the Bush Administration, are looking to increase work requirements and make life even more difficult for poor families. Congress and the White House

should be looking instead at how to better support low-income families who are trying to work, even in a weak economy.

Work supports such as child care, transportation, and rental assistance are woefully inadequate in most states, particularly now that states are experiencing severe budget deficits. Even if low-wage earners are doing all they can to stay employed, without supports in place, they are more likely to lose their jobs.

The best ticket out of poverty is more education and training. Yet the Bush Administration's proposal, by increasing work requirements and restricting state flexibility, makes it even more difficult for parents to get the education and training they need to secure better paying jobs that will permanently move them beyond poverty.

continued on page 2

More state revenue needed to save safety net

As a third Special Session looms on the horizon and the state's budget crisis shows no signs of abating, it is imperative that Oregonians speak out in support of increasing revenues to help protect the weakened public safety net. Without additional funds coming into the state's treasury, the Governor and legislators will

have no choice but to make another set of deep and devastating cuts to human services, education, public safety, and other critical programs.

In its new *Hunger Headlines 2002*, the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF) recommends fighting hunger and homelessness by maintaining and strengthening the safety net for low-wage workers and other vulnerable Oregonians, especially during these tough economic times. This will take more money. Are our elected officials ready to make these

kinds of tough decisions? They need to hear from you!

OHRTF and Oregon Food Bank support revenue options that do not hurt those already struggling in our poor economy. These options include delaying the implementation of Measure 88 (federal income tax deduction change) and instituting a temporary surcharge on state income taxes (strategy used during the recession in early 1980s).

Call your State Representative and State Senator today! Ask them to consider new sources of revenue!

Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force's *Hunger Headlines 2002* is now available! To get a copy (or more copies), call Holly Wilkalis, (503) 963-2292 or holly.wilkalis@hcs.state.or.us.

Medical assistance now available for women with breast or cervical cancer

During the 2001 Legislature, lawmakers passed a bill enabling Oregon to take advantage of a federal option to provide medical assistance based on a woman's need of treatment for breast or cervical cancer, including pre-cancerous conditions. The rules for the program went into effect April 1st.

To be eligible, a woman must be found to need treatment through her enrollment in the Oregon Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. Income eligibility for this program is up to 250% of the federal poverty level. She must also be under the age of 65 and not already covered by health insurance.

The program is administered by participating county health departments and tribal health clinics. For more information, contact Patricia Schoonmaker, with the Oregon Breast and Cervical Cancer Program at the Department of Human Services, (503) 731-4273 or patricia.schoonmaker@state.or.us.

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

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Welfare and Congress *continued from page one*

Your voice needed now!

People must let Congress know that TANF reauthorization should focus on *real needs right now*, not on stereotypes that have nothing to do with people's abilities to keep their jobs and move into better paying jobs. Any TANF reauthorization bill that gets through Congress should:

- protect state flexibility (a one-size-fits-all approach won't help Oregon);
- provide more supports for working poor families (child care, transportation, rent assistance, etc.)
- increase access to education and training so people can move out of poverty; and
- provide adequate funding to states (so cash grant levels don't erode over time).

From poverty to promise

The "Working from Poverty to Promise Act of 2002" (H.R. 4210) is a bi-partisan bill introduced by Rep. Roukema (R-NJ) and Rep. Tierney (D-MA). The bill takes a proactive approach to improving the TANF program in ways that will help workers acquire better-paying jobs and improve the lives of their children. Introduced on behalf of the anti-hunger group Bread for the World, the bill

- ⇒ sets poverty reduction as a goal of TANF,
- ⇒ boosts education and training opportunities,
- ⇒ eases time limits and improves the welfare-to-work transition, and
- ⇒ ensures adequate resources for the states.

See "Take Five" on page one to take action. It's time to really support working families and their children!

Senior Farmers' Market coupons return, helping seniors and local farmers

Federal funds totaling \$838,000 are now available for a second year of the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program in Oregon. This program will provide more than 10,000 low-income seniors with \$80 worth of coupons to use directly with farmers who grow fruits and vegetables and sell them at farmers' markets or roadside stands.

Seniors are eligible if they are 60 years old (as of April 1st), are receiving food stamps and/or Medicaid, and are not living in a facility where meals are provided.

By May 15th, eligible seniors will receive a postcard from the state office for Seniors and People with Disabilities. To participate

in the program and get the coupons, seniors must return the postcard by May 31st. If you did not get a postcard, call the toll free number listed at the end of this article.

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program supports local farmers. The coupons can only be used for fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs sold by participating farmers' markets and farm stands. The coupons must be used between June 5, 2002 and October 31, 2002.

For more information about senior participation, call Seniors and People with Disabilities at **1-866-299-3562**. If you have questions about farmers' markets and farm stands, call the Department of Agriculture in Salem at (503) 872-6600.

Oregon Telephone Assistance Program underused despite increase in Food Stamp households

Low-income households may be eligible for assistance with their monthly telephone bills through the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP). To be eligible, a person must be receiving food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or certain types of medical assistance.

OTAP provides about \$11 each month to help a qualified household with the cost of their basic telephone service. The program is administered by the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) and is funded by user surcharges.

Although the number of OTAP recipients has been on the rise (about 7,600 more participating families from February 2001 to February 2002), the increase in the number of food stamp households during the same period was significantly higher (46,500 more families). Currently, less than one in four food stamp families is also receiving OTAP.

Food stamp recipients should be told OTAP is available when they apply or when they are recertified for benefits. They should also be told about Link-Up America, another telephone assistance program that pays half the cost of the line connection charge to start new telephone service. Forms for both programs are available at all food stamp offices.

For more information, contact any food stamp office (call **1-800-SAFENET** for the nearest location), or call the PUC at **1-800-848-4442** or go to www.puc.state.or.us/consumer/summary.htm.