



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

October 2002
Volume 8 Issue 11



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Vote in November!

Where do the candidates stand on hunger?

Background: Oregon is first in the nation in hunger. The November election is a good time to make sure our elected leaders will make hunger a priority. Good public policy is the key to eliminating hunger and its root causes. Voters need to hold politicians accountable on this issue!

Actions:

- Attend candidate forums and ask questions.
- Educate yourself about the candidates.
- Ask yourself: which candidate will do the most to address the root causes of hunger?

Ask candidates:

What specific plans do you have to reduce child hunger and child poverty in Oregon?

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

National researchers perplexed by high level of hunger in Oregon

Using newly released government figures, a Brandeis University research team has calculated the first comprehensive statistics on hunger in America for the three-year period from 1998 through 2000. Oregon once again came out as the highest-ranking state in the incidence of food insecurity with hunger and moved from sixth place to third place in the incidence of overall food insecurity.

Food security is defined as access to enough food at all times for an active and healthy life.

Food insecurity occurs whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, is limited or uncertain.

Food insecurity with hunger is the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a recurrent or involuntary lack of food. Over time, hunger may result in malnutrition.

Pacific Northwest has high levels of food insecurity

The state of Washington ranked second to Oregon in incidence of food insecurity with hunger and tenth in the overall food insecurity. Brandeis researchers were perplexed by the high incidence of hunger in the Northwest, particularly Oregon and Washington, which have lower poverty rates than other states.

Two other recent studies may help explain Oregon's high hunger ranking.

Housing costs vs. incomes

The National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) released its *Out of Reach* report, analyzing rental housing costs for America's poor families. In Oregon, an extremely low-income household (earning \$14,921, 30% of the Area Median Income of \$49,736) can afford \$373 per month in rent, but the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$685.

According to the NLIHC report, the "housing wage" in Oregon is \$13.18 – the amount a full-time (40 hours per week) worker must earn in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market Rent. This wage is 203% of Oregon's current minimum wage (\$6.50 per hour). Between 2001 and 2002, the two-bedroom housing wage in Oregon increased by 3.15%.

Assets lag behind other states

The Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University also recently released a 50-state study of the key assets Americans need to succeed in today's economy. Approximately 39 assets were examined and states were ranked (best to worst) on their residents' access to these assets. Oregon ranked poorly on:

- residents wanting full-time jobs but having only part-time ones (45 out of 50)
- working families living below a family-wage budget (43 out of 50)
- inequality of income, i.e., bottom fifth's share of all personal income as a percentage of the top fifth's share (40 out of 50), and
- housing insecurity (45 out of 50).

For more information about these reports, see these websites:

www.centeronhunger.org
www.nlihc.org

VOTE in November!

Oregon Food Bank supports Measure 25

Oregon Food Bank says vote "Yes" on Measure 25 when you receive your ballot for the November 5 election.

Measure 25 would raise Oregon's minimum wage from \$6.50 per hour to \$6.90 per hour on January 1, 2003, and would provide annual cost-of-living adjustments to keep pace with inflation.

No Oregonian who works full-time should live in poverty. And no Oregonian who works should go hungry. Measure 25 will help low-income working people have more money to cover their monthly expenses, including buying food.

More information: www.oregonminimumwage.org.

Summer Food Program update

We recently asked you to make calls supporting a bill in Congress introduced by Senator Lugar to help increase the number of children participating in the Summer Food Program (see July/August *Advocacy Alert*). The bill would expand a successful summer food pilot program for public sponsors (reduced paperwork, increased reimbursement) to all states.

In August the Senate Appropriations Committee added the provisions of Senator Lugar's bill as a one-year expansion of the pilot to its FY2003 Agriculture Appropriations Act.

This is good news because the Summer Food Program needs to reach many more low-income children. Currently, for every 100 children who receive a free or reduced-price lunch during the regular school year, only 21 children receive meals during the summer.

Please contact your U.S. Representative and Senators and ask them to support this modest expansion of the Summer Food Program in the final FY2003 Agriculture Appropriations Act.

Oregon Health Plan "expansion" needs to be challenged

by Lorey Freeman
Oregon Law Center

The state soon expects to receive federal approval of its new "OHP2" program. While this move has been described as an expansion of the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), it is really only a shift in health care coverage from the very poor to the poor.

To keep the "expansion" cost neutral (i.e., keep it from costing the state more money), a few more people will be eligible, but almost everyone on the program will get less and pay more.

Currently, the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) provides a wide range of services to individuals and families with incomes below the federal poverty line. OHP2 will restrict the range of covered services. It will also extend coverage to people with incomes 10% above the poverty line (110% FPL), but will severely restrict access to the very poor.

This will happen because there will be no allowance for

waiving monthly premiums, even for those with no income. According to state data, 40% of those receiving OHP benefits have incomes below the federal poverty line. Under OHP2, if the premium is not paid, the family will be disqualified the very next month, not at the end of the six-month coverage period as now exists. Once disqualified, they cannot re-qualify for six months.

In addition to premiums, OHP2 recipients will have to pay co-payments for every service they receive. These co-pays will range from \$2 to \$250, and there will be no maximum.

Call your U.S. Representative and Senators and ask them to demand that the OHP2 waiver protect the health care for Oregon's poorest citizens. Call your state legislators and ask them to revisit HB 2519 in the upcoming session. Tell them you want a real expansion of OHP, not an illusory one.

Legislature refers tax increase to voters in January

A fifth Special Session of the Oregon State Legislature held to address the state's budget woes concluded on September 18. Eighteen days of tense discussions resulted in a package containing more borrowing, some cuts, and a temporary income tax increase referred to the voters. The final deal avoided \$482 million in across-the-board cuts ordered by the Governor to balance the budget.

On January 28, Oregon voters will decide the fate of a three-year temporary income tax increase that will raise \$313 million to provide the revenue needed to avoid huge cuts to essential state services. If the tax measure is voted down, \$310 million in cuts will immediately take effect.

The final budget package of the Fifth Special Session included \$44 million in general fund cuts; the Department of Human Services' (DHS) portion of these cuts was about \$7 million. This is on top of the \$78 million in cuts absorbed by DHS since last July.

There isn't enough space to list the \$85 million in cuts to DHS programs (the total since the budget crisis began). Every state program that provides services to vulnerable Oregonians has been negatively affected by the state's revenue shortfall. Children, seniors, disabled individuals, low-income families — you name the group, they've been hurt by the cuts.

Although the temporary tax increase isn't the perfect answer, the cuts that will result from not approving it in January are so dire and so unthinkable that the future of Oregon is on the line. What kind of state do YOU want to live in?

Food stamps: help get the word out!

The Food Stamp Program is there to help families who are experiencing hard times, but many families don't know that they might be eligible. Many of you have put a lot of time and effort into helping us spread the word about food stamps, but we still have more work to do. This would be a great time to:

- Talk to your school district to make sure they are distributing Food Stamp outreach fliers to students.
- Make sure community organizations in your area are making outreach fliers and Food Stamp applications available to customers and clients.
- Talk to people in your community about Food Stamps and how they both help individual families purchase food and bring more federal dollars into the local economy.

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force has a variety of outreach materials available, free of charge, to anyone wishing to help spread the word about Food Stamps. To download sample materials and an order form, visit <http://www.oregonhunger.org/pubs.html> or call (503) 963-2292.

If you would like to be a community distribution site for the Food Stamp application, call Nancy Hatch at (503) 963-2291.

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

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