



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

September 2002
Volume 8 Issue 10



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action: Call Senators Smith and Wyden **today!** If you've called in past months, please call again. We need to keep the pressure on.

Background: The Senate Finance Committee bill on TANF Reauthorization, The Work Act, represents a vast improvement over the House TANF Reauthorization bill. The Work Act retains the 30-hour work week and allows states to count more education and training activities toward meeting the federal work requirement.

Message: Support the Work Act and amendments beneficial to poor families (such as greater increase in child care funding). Ask Senate leaders to bring the Work Act to a floor vote ASAP. Oppose any attempts to make the bill more punitive for poor families with children.

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

Oregon Helps - www.oregonhelps.org

Helping families learn about their eligibility for federal and state programs

A powerful new online tool called **Oregon Helps** (www.oregonhelps.org) is available to assist Oregon families in learning about their eligibility for a dozen programs set up to help low-income households.

The website provides people with a list of programs they might be eligible for and information on how to find out more. The site does *not* determine actual eligibility.

Visitors to **Oregon Helps** are asked to answer a variety of questions about their household, such as income and expenses, and then this information is used to calculate potential eligibility.

Any personal information provided is anonymous (it does not ask who you are) and confidential (information is not shared with anyone).

Oregon Helps currently provides information about:

- Food Stamps
- Oregon Health Plan
- Employment Related Day Care (ERDC)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Federal Housing Assistance (such as Section 8)
- Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Tax Credits (federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits and Oregon's Working Family Child Care Tax Credit)
- Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)
- National School Lunch Program
- Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)

- Emergency Food (through the nonprofit Oregon Food Bank statewide network).

More programs coming

Plans are underway to expand the website to include programs specific to seniors and disabled persons.

Multiple languages

The website can be used in either English or Spanish. Russian and Vietnamese will be available this month.

Feedback welcome

Please check out the website and let us know what you think by completing the survey at the end.

If you have questions about **Oregon Helps**, please contact Janet Hawkins, (503) 988-3707 or janet.c.hawkins@co.multnomah.or.us.

VOICES Project informs OFB advocacy work

Every year Oregon Food Bank's Advocacy Department conducts a series of focus groups with emergency food pantry clients around the state. Known simply as the **Voices** project, these conversations are one way Oregon Food Bank (OFB) strives to include the voices of low-income people in the discussion about who is hungry and what needs to be done to eliminate hunger and its root causes.

The focus group project is an example of OFB's commitment to *informed* advocacy. By engaging and listening to emergency food recipients, we gain a deeper

understanding of the complexity and ramifications of hunger and poverty. OFB collects the thoughts and experiences of focus group participants into a report that is distributed to elected officials, our statewide network of regional food banks, and many others.

Some stories shared this year in the focus groups include:

In **Prineville**, a woman described how her husband drives 50 miles round trip every day to his \$7.50/hour job. There are few jobs in communities like Prineville and jobs in the Redmond-Bend area are low-wage.

This family of three finds it hard to keep up with monthly expenses.

In **Portland**, a mother of two small children recounted how her family was homeless for sixth months. Living in a motel, the family found it impossible to cook anything nutritious since they didn't have access to a kitchen.

In **Albany**, a mother of two young boys described how lack of money is a barrier to getting food for her family. "We have two growing boys," she said. "They eat more and more all the time. They eat a lot as they grow. We can't keep up."

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Special Session IV and beyond

The Oregon State Legislature convened yet another Special Session to deal with two vetoes made by Governor Kitzhaber on bills dealing with school funding. In the end, the legislature sustained the Governor's veto of HB 4056 (bonding cigarette tax revenue) and overrode the veto of SB 1022, which delayed the final payment to schools to the next biennium.

The result is another \$50 million (from HB 4056) added to the deficit, along with the expectation that the September revenue forecast will show an additional \$450 million deficit from decreased income tax receipts. A fifth Special Session will probably convene in early September.

The Department of Human Services has already experienced sharp reductions since the close of the last Legislative Session. Please contact your state legislators and the Governor NOW. Ask them to support new revenue options and not reduce critical state services even further. (See contact information on page 1.)

TANF UPDATE

As Congress winds up its summer recess, some major business needs resolution before the end of the federal fiscal year (September 30). One issue important to low-income families is reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. A TANF Reauthorization bill passed the House earlier this year, much to the chagrin of low-income and child advocates because of its punitive and restrictive nature. The Senate Finance Committee passed a much more humane TANF Reauthorization bill in June, but it never moved to a full Senate vote before Congress recessed for the summer.

It is imperative that when the Senate returns after Labor Day, TANF Reauthorization be given priority and moved to a floor vote and to conference committee with the House before the session ends. Otherwise, the reauthorization process will need to

begin anew next year with the potential to lose many of the improvements included in the current Senate Finance Committee bill (see June and July/August 2002 issues of *Advocacy Alert* for background).

A recent poll of Oregon registered voters, commissioned by the Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCP) and conducted by Davis, Hibbitts, & McCaig, Inc. of Portland, showed that Oregon voters oppose President Bush's plan to increase work requirements and promote marriage for people on welfare (a plan mirrored by the House TANF Reauthorization bill).

According to a report in *The Oregonian* (August, 22, 2002), Democrats and Republicans showed strong consensus throughout the poll in favor of providing more work supports, training and education to help people move from welfare to good jobs. Only seven percent

avored spending more on programs that encourage marriage. Most Oregon voters oppose tougher work requirements for people on welfare, support benefits for legal immigrants and favor spending more money on child care, cash benefits and training—more than Oregon provides now. For example, 70 percent of voters favor giving cost-of-living increases to Oregon welfare recipients, who currently receive the same level of cash support they received in 1992—\$460 a month for a mother and two children.

The poll of Oregon voters shows results similar to a national poll on welfare reauthorization conducted this past spring by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. Conclusions from the national poll suggest voters are very much in favor of doing things that will help people get out of poverty and into good jobs.

VOICES Project informs OFB advocacy work *continued from page one*

In **Sutherlin**, a woman explained how her husband works seasonally in construction and how this makes receiving food stamps a headache. Since his monthly income varies, this family of four finds it difficult to make do with food stamps. Currently, they receive only \$10 a month in food stamps. "We don't bother reapplying in lean months because it's difficult to plan a monthly budget, since the amount goes up and down, and because the paperwork is time-consuming," she said.

Each focus group lasts about two hours. The questions cover a variety of topics,

including barriers to obtaining food, the Food Stamp Program, employment and training, housing, child-care, health care, and transportation. Each participant receives a small stipend, and a light meal is provided during the session. Participants are also reimbursed for any child care and transportation costs they incur in order to attend.

This is the sixth year of the **Voices** project. A total of 78 individuals participated in eight focus groups in early summer. The groups were held in the Albany area (one at a pantry and one with gleaners), Portland (one in English and one in Russian),

Prineville, Sutherlin, The Dalles, and Tillamook.

Thank you to the following emergency food providers who hosted the focus groups: Salvation Army (Albany), Linn Benton Food Share (Tangent), FISH Emergency Services (Portland), St. Vincent de Paul (Prineville), Sutherlin-Oakland Food Pantry (Sutherlin), St. Vincent de Paul (The Dalles), and Salvation Army (Tillamook).

The 2002 **Voices** report will be available next month. To receive a copy, call Joyce Walsh at (503) 282-0555 x 202 or email her at jwalsh@oregonfoodbank.org.

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