



# Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK  
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

April 2005  
Volume 11 Issue 4



## take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

### Action:

Contact your state Senator and Representative, asking them to add funding for General Assistance, the Emergency Assistance Program and Job Support and Retention Services.

### Message:

- ✓ Basic support program for the lowest income Oregonians are critical to their survival and, the communities well-being.
- ✓ Cuts in these programs will result in more homelessness which costs a lot more to address.
- ✓ Help stabilize vulnerable families and individuals.

## Legislative Yellow Pages

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

## State budget priorities: protecting those most in need

In a press release dated April 7, 2005 the Human Services Coalition of Oregon (HSCO) stated that

"This week the Ways & Means Co-Chairs released two versions of proposed changes to the Governor's Recommended Budget. Both proposals took some significant steps forward in efforts to protect Oregon's most vulnerable citizens. Employment Related Daycare, Assistance for Foster parents, and Community Mental Health funding are areas in which both proposals recommend preserving funding. But we have many more programs that still must be addressed. Those that need further consideration include: child protection (System of Care), alcohol and drug addiction treatment, a proposal to cap enrollment for home & community-based care for seniors and people with

disabilities, General Assistance, dental and vision care for the Oregon Health Plan, and assisted living facility rates. In addition, we have seen a big reduction in the number of DHS workers providing vital services – even with fewer workers being cut in the Co-Chairs' budgets, we still face a loss of about 400 human services employees."

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and Oregon Food Bank have been stressing the need to restore funding for the General Assistance Program, the Emergency Assistance Program, and Job Support and Retention Services to help stabilize vulnerable families. None of these programs was restored in the existing budget proposals. But it is not too late to change that. See *Take Five* for action that we need your help with!

As the HSCO press release concludes:

"The good news is we can afford to provide funding for these and some other vital services. Just like the Ways & Means process, it's about priorities. Oregon is expecting to see a positive revenue forecast, and each of the Co-Chair's budgets contains substantial ending balances within the agreed upon \$12.4 million. To further provide that Oregon can protect its most vulnerable, the legislature should be stringent with the over 150 tax cuts that have been proposed this session. 'We could give a tax break to pleasure boat owners, or with the same money, we could provide in-home and community-based care for over 700 seniors and people with disabilities' said Jessica Stevens, HSCO Co-Chair. 'It's about priorities.'"

## Hunger in Central Oregon

*Guest column by Steve Murray, Central Oregon Community Action*

The problems people in Central Oregon face providing for themselves and their families everyday are very real. Being hungry is not an isolated circumstance but rather a symptom that people's incomes have not kept up with increases in housing, medical and transportation costs. A recent Oregon State Uni-

versity study links low wages, high unemployment rates, and high housing costs to Oregon's continued presence near the top in both hunger and food insecurity rankings. Central Oregonians experience all of these economic conditions; Crook County is no exception. The region's large population growth over the past 15 years has not necessarily brought with it the jobs that allow families to meet all of their

basic needs. While Crook County's unemployment rate is lower today than one year ago it still exceeds the state average. Wages for workers in the county continue to lag behind those statewide by 20%. Two local agencies who work with residents seeking help with housing, utility costs and emergency food are COCAAN and St. Vincent DePaul. Our experiences and the clients we serve

*(continued on page 2)*

# COCAAN works closely with community

(continued from page 1)

show the human side of the OSU data.

Ida Settlemyer is a Housing Advocate in the COCAAN Prineville office who says “I work with people every day who need help with rent and utilities.” A typical client may be a single mother with two children who commutes to Bend for a minimum wage job that offers no health benefits. When her car breaks down she is forced to put all of her income into getting it fixed to keep that job. Some families actually have to give up their housing in situations like this, with the car becoming not only transportation but also a place to sleep at night. The resources COCAAN’s Prineville office has to help families do not stretch nearly far

enough. “Since July 05, COCAAN has received 278 requests in Prineville for help with rent or housing, but we’ve only had enough funding to help 46 families. 302 requests for utility assistance this year have had to be turned down” Settlemyer said. In many cases feeding a family is often the last priority when people are juggling vehicle costs, rent or mortgage, and utility bills with limited income.


COCAAN works closely with the Prineville food bank, run by St. Vincent de Paul at 240 E. 1<sup>st</sup> St. Marcella Edmonds coordinates the distribution of food, household items, and vouchers to Crook County residents. She described the situation one family found

itself in recently. “A near retirement couple with two grown disabled boys faced a power shutoff for non payment.” The family’s circumstance was brought on by unexpected medical costs due to surgical complications. All their funds were going to pay this expense with nothing left over for necessities. St. Vincent was able to help them with a food box and a utility voucher. St. Vincent de Paul food bank provides more than 225 emergency food boxes each month, and approximately 160 of these food boxes go to families with children.

Creating community solutions that allow more people to succeed benefits all of us. These can be short term

such as providing more emergency assistance, or getting more people connected with programs such as food stamps and school meals for children. They must also include long-range economic solutions that provide an environment where more people have jobs and income that let them meet all their basic needs including housing costs, adequate medical care and food.

With business, government, and individual members of the community all working together, Central Oregon can be a place where its residents do not suffer from lack of the very basic necessity of food.

**Take Action with ease...**   
[www.oregonfoodbank.org](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org)  
 **ADVOCATE**

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

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## Federal budget update: House and Senate move to iron out differences

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, the Senate and House each passed budget proposals. Both budgets vary from the President’s budget in some of the details but follow the Administration’s lead by proposing deep spending cuts for low-income domestic programs and generous tax cuts for the nation’s wealthiest tax payers. The bitter irony of the two budget proposals is that the cuts to low-income programs would have a large impact on individuals and communities but a small impact on reducing the federal deficit. The cuts to programs such as food stamps, housing or the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) will not compensate for all of the revenue lost through the extension of tax cuts. As a result, the most vulnerable in our country are carrying a disproportional

burden in the quest to establish some federal fiscal discipline. The one cause for celebration is the passage of the Smith/Bingham amendment on Medicaid. Senator Smith deserves thanks for taking leadership in protecting funding for Medicaid with an amendment preventing \$14 billion in Medicaid cuts from becoming part of the Senate budget resolution. However, this is not a secure victory until the House and Senate reach a conference agreement on a final budget. The House-passed budget includes instructions to cut as much as \$20 billion from Medicaid. The message to all House members is to work for a final budget with no cuts to Medicaid. In addition to Medicaid, low-

income advocates are concerned about the host of other cuts spelled out in both budgets which include instructions to cut funding from the Agriculture committee. Food stamps and other nutrition programs are among those at risk. The food stamp program has been instrumental to Oregon’s success in moving from #1 to #8 in state hunger rankings. Every Oregon delegate should stand up to minimize cuts to the nutrition programs that are helping thousands of Oregonians maintain a basic level of food security. Congress will be completing their work on the federal budget this month. Please take a moment to contact your federal delegates and urge them to stand up for a budget that protects the most vulnerable Oregonians.