



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

December 2005
Volume 11 Issue 12



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Call Senator Smith and thank him for his support of food stamps and Medicaid. In a move that places him at odds with many members of his party, Sen. Smith confirmed his support for a final budget bill that protects Medicaid recipients from cost increases and contains no cuts to food stamps. Washington, D.C. Telephone number: 202-224-3753

Message:

Thank you for your leadership in protecting Oregonians who use food stamps and Medicaid from harmful cuts.

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

Hunger for the holidays

The holidays are here again. For many Oregonians they bring special meals, warm homes, and family gathered close. For other families, the picture is an entirely different one. Here are a few things to consider as you contemplate your holiday dinner this year.

Some Have Fuller Plates:

A recent USDA study reports that Oregon's hunger rate has fallen to 3.8%, taking Oregon off the list of the top ten hungriest states for the first time in several years. Following closely on the heels of that study, another USDA report released November 18, 2005, helps to explain the change. In 2003, 83% of Oregon's food stamp eligible households participated in the program, the highest rate in the country. No other state is doing a better job of reaching people in need of food assistance with this important resource.

Some Just Get Leftovers:

Though it's good news that more people are able to get help when they need it, we wish we could say that fewer people needed the help in the first place. Though our hunger rate has fallen dramatically, the rate of

food insecurity has remained largely unchanged. Each month, about 194,000 people eat from an emergency food box. More than 1 in 10 Oregonians still experience difficulty obtaining enough food to last throughout the month.

And while there are signs that our sluggish economy has begun to improve, most of the improvements in hunger to date have been accomplished by getting people signed up for programs like food stamps, WIC, and school meals. Food boxes help too, and the Oregon Food Bank network continues to increase the amount of food it handles and the number of people served each year.

These programs help alleviate the most immediate symptoms of hunger but do nothing to address the root cause of the problem: stagnant wages. As long as working families cannot earn enough to pay for basic needs such as food, housing and medicine, they will be at risk for hunger.

Some Are Not Invited to Dinner At All:

The same day that the USDA reported on the increase in food stamp

use, the House passed a bill that would severely limit access to food stamps and other programs. The changes would cut an estimated 220,000 to 250,000 low-income people across the country from the Food Stamp Program by 2008. They would also impact Medicaid, child support enforcement, student loans, foster care, and other supports critical to the stability of working families. Utility assistance funds are limited again this year as well, forcing many families to choose between heating and eating.

As you sit down to the table this holiday season, take a few moments to remember the good news and how we got there. Give thanks for all the hard work that goes into ensuring that people in need are fed. After dinner do your part to make sure that the good news doesn't become bad news by this time next year. Take a few minutes to contact your Senator and Representative to let them know you oppose cuts to food stamps or any other program that will harm vulnerable families.



Oregon faces double trouble from Food Stamp cuts outlined in budget bill

On November 17th the House passed its version of the Reconciliation bill. The budget-cutting bill includes nearly \$700 million in cuts to food stamps achieved by reducing eligibility for two groups of people, legal immigrants and low-income working households.

Oregon is one of eleven states that has fully adopted the provisions of “categorical eligibility” in order to help more low-wage, working families get nutrition assistance. Oregon is also one of a handful of states with a large number of legal immigrants who would lose food stamp benefits.

State impact

Should the food stamp cuts in the House bill go into effect, more than 15,000

households stand to lose benefits including more than 11,600 children who live in those households. The cut to immigrant eligibility would impact an estimated 1,000 legal immigrants in Oregon.

Categorical Eligibility

Through categorical eligibility, states are given the flexibility to raise the gross income test for food stamps and disregard the value of certain assets such as a vehicle. After deductions, every household must have a net income of 100% federal poverty level (FPL) or less in order to qualify for food stamp benefits. Categorical eligibility does not extend benefits to households with higher disposable income; it extends benefits to households with higher

expenses and assets often associated with the cost of working (childcare and transportation). Eliminating categorical eligibility would result in a direct cut to hard-working, low-wage households in Oregon.

Categorically eligible households often qualify for a lower monthly food stamp benefit. Some families only receive a minimum \$10 a month. However, there are several benefits of participating in the program. When a household qualifies for food stamps their children are automatically enrolled in the federally funded school lunch program. In addition, food stamp households are eligible for discounted telephone

service through the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program. This package of benefits is threatened by the elimination of categorical eligibility.

Advocates have one more opportunity to stave off these cuts. The Senate and House are now in the process of hammering out the differences between the two bills. The Senate bill includes zero cuts to food stamps and a balanced approach to health care cuts. We must continue to communicate with Senator Smith that we are counting on him to stand up for Oregon’s most vulnerable by rejecting any final reconciliation bill that harms low-income Oregonians. See this month’s ‘take five.’

Take Action with ease...
www.oregonfoodbank.org

(click on)



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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Coordinating council on hunger creates strategic plan

The Inter-Agency Coordinating Council on Hunger (ICCH) is a Governor appointed body made up of state agency leaders who oversee food assistance programs. The ICCH has adopted a strategic plan for the next two years that addresses several of the goals outlined in the “The Act To End Hunger: 40 Ways in 5 Years to Make a Difference.” Two major initiatives involve targeted outreach on Food Stamps and Summer Food programs. The state committees for each of these efforts are looking for people in the target communities to serve on local steering committees to help determine what is most needed in those communities.

For Food Stamp outreach, ICCH will target the fol-

lowing low –participation counties:

- Benton County- collaborations with OSU Extension and Service Learning to reach students, expanding outreach to serve other local populations.
- Clatsop County- expanding options used in other rural areas, like faxing applications, to decrease transportation and other consumer barriers.
- Klamath County- focusing on transportation, stigma and other rural barriers.
- Marion / Polk Counties- focusing on businesses with low-wage workers, immigrants and rural areas.

For Summer Food outreach, ICCH will target the following areas:

Clatsop County – working in conjunction with a local

food policy committee to bring sites to unserved areas, including Astoria. Douglas County – supporting UCAN, the local community action program, in its efforts to expand and strengthen programs in underserved areas. Linn County – evaluating barriers and helping to expand participation. Washington County – evaluating barriers and helping to expand participation.

If you have a local contact in one or more of these counties who would be willing to participate in outreach efforts, please contact Holly at the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force at 503-595-5502. Together we can continue to expand these vital programs in Oregon and continue to reduce hunger.