



# Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK  
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

February 2006  
Volume 12 Issue 1



## take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

### Action:

Please take action to ensure DHS programs are fully funded. You may either email your legislator or call your legislator at the toll-free State Legislature Information Line: **1-800-332-2313**.

### Message:

- ✓ Protect these critical programs and services for vulnerable Oregonians.
- ✓ Protect and fully fund the safety net programs that keep thousands of children, families, seniors and people with disabilities healthy and safe.
- ✓ Now is not the time to cut the budget for DHS programs.



### Take Action with ease...

[www.oregonfoodbank.org](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org)



ADVOCATE

## 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

## Increased need drives a \$172 million hole in DHS budget

The Department of Human Services has been in the news lately because of a serious budget shortfall that has been developing since early 2005. While the media has focused on poor caseload forecasting by the Department, the advocacy community knows that the real issue is one of increasing needs. The budget cuts over the past few years have forced many low-income people onto programs that cost the State more than the original benefits provided to those people. For example, some individuals forced off the Oregon Health Plan Standard worsened in health, qualified for disability and ended up on the more expensive Oregon Health Plan Plus. The budget forecast expected these

individuals to simply do without health coverage.

A coalition of groups, including Children First for Oregon, the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and Oregon Food Bank, recently sent a letter to the Emergency Board of the Legislature regarding the course of action that would best solve this problem, outlining three main points:

### 1. *This is ultimately a problem of need, not forecasting.*

We encourage the legislature not to forget that this is about people. At this point, 70 percent of the \$172 million deficit is due to increased caseloads and costs per case. Caseload numbers do not capture the true extent of the need across the state, but they do

reflect how many Oregonians who are eligible for services are receiving them. Budget cuts over the last four years have resulted in a watered-down human services system that has, ironically, created more complex needs that require higher-cost services. We have greatly reduced prevention and intervention services, thus creating eligibility and need for more expensive solutions. We have also reduced the capacity of local services infrastructures to respond cost-effectively to problems. There is no indication that the gap between caseloads and available funding will change substantially after the Department has more firm caseload projections. We

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## Advocacy in action: citizen advocate becomes a champion for others

Thanks to the advocacy and persistence of two citizen advocates, some food stamp recipients who receive help from Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) across the state will soon receive more money on their food stamp benefits.

Cynthia has been receiving food stamp benefits for several years. She also receives energy assistance through the Low Income Energy Assistance Program. About a year ago her monthly food stamp allot-

ment was reduced by almost \$60 a month. The reduction was triggered by a change in the utility allowance used in the calculation of her benefits.

The utility allowance is the standard amount deducted from the household income to help determine the food stamp benefit amount. Utility costs include separate bills for heating and cooling, cooking fuel, electricity, water, trash, sewer, and telephone. Costs for cable or satellite TV and internet service are not counted

toward the utility allowance.

When calculating food stamp benefits, a household is assigned one of three utility allowances: a full utility allowance (FUA), a limited utility allowance (LUA) or a single utility allowance (SUA). A higher allowance means more food benefits. The policy states that if a household receives LIEAP they automatically qualify for the FUA, the largest allowance. The policy was

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# Increased need drives a hole in DHS budget

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urge you to focus on the real driver behind the numbers – increased need.

## 2. This is a 24-month problem.

While we believe need and the complexity of that need is driving this deficit, we encourage a careful response, allowing the Department time to clarify its numbers for the Legislature and the Governor. By the April Emergency Board meeting, the Department will have a

stronger understanding of the problem and thus the next steps will be based on the best available information. While we understand that the shortfall will be more challenging to address as we get further into the biennium, we believe a cautious approach that does not immediately rush to program reductions is warranted at this time.

## 3. All options must be considered.

We encourage the legislature to keep all possible solutions on the table, including a special session and additional revenue to balance the DHS budget for 2005-07. Once the scope of the rebalance issue is clarified, we look forward to a robust discussion about the best policy choices for Oregon’s most vulnerable citizens. We believe additional revenue must be part of the discussion. Deep cuts to essential

human services will be devastating for people and will damage the state’s economic recovery. We must protect the programs currently in place.

Please let your legislators know they need to protect low-income families from further cuts and find the revenue to provide needed services. See this month’s ‘take five’.

# Citizen advocate becomes a champion for others

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being incorrectly interpreted and some LIEAP food stamp recipients were receiving the LUA, resulting in a lower food stamp benefit. This is exactly what happened to Cynthia.

The process of correcting the error took a year. After get-

ting Cynthia's benefits restored, Cynthia and her brother started advocating for others to have their benefits restored.

Anti-hunger advocates are working with DHS Food Stamp Policy staff to help

all LIEAP food stamp recipients in Oregon receive the correct benefit amount. The efforts will include a review of food stamp cases to determine if the same mistake was made for other LIEAP food stamp households.

If you or someone you know receives both food stamps and LIEAP, contact your DHS caseworker or the Legal Aid Public Benefits Line, 1-800-520-5292, with questions and to see if you qualify.

## Trainings offered for new Summer Food Service Program sponsors



Don't let the weather fool you, summer really is just a few months away. And summer brings with it the long summer vacation, an end to the school lunch program and an increase in childhood hunger. That's why this is a good time to start thinking about the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

To participate in the SFSP, new sponsors must attend one of these upcoming application training sessions. However, attending the training does not obligate you to participate in the program.

Schools – February 23 in Medford, or March 8 in Salem

Non-profits or other community-based organizations: March 1 in Salem

The SFSP is a federally-funded meal program that provides reimbursement for meals served to children 18 and under in qualifying neighborhoods. To qualify, 50% or more of the children residing in the area must qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. Eligible sites can serve meals to any child who wants to participate, regardless of their family's income. Some sites provide just the meal, while others pair it with activities or other summer programs. Schools, local governments, churches, food banks and other non-profit entities all make great SFSP sponsors.

For more information on the SFSP and the upcoming trainings, please contact Barbara Cracknell with the Oregon Department of Education at 503-378-3600 x2619 or [barbara.cracknell@state.or.us](mailto:barbara.cracknell@state.or.us). To learn about what you can do to support summer meal programs in your community, contact Holly Wilkalis with the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force at 503-595-5502 or [holly@oregonhunger.org](mailto:holly@oregonhunger.org).

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

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