



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE November 2004
Volume 10 Issue 11



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Contact your members of Congress to tell them to ensure full funding for Section 8

Message:

- ✓ Protect funding for Section 8. This program provides crucial housing support for our most vulnerable families.
- ✓ Current funding only covers 1 out of 4 income eligible households.
- ✓ Elderly, disabled, low-income working families, and landlords need the stability offered through this important program.

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 (Dist. 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

Housing protections at risk for low-income families

This week approximately 400 people attended public hearings at the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP), regarding proposed changes to the local Section 8 voucher program. Changes will result in significant rent increases for thousands of families. Federal budget cuts are forcing these changes at the local level. Over 18,000 people in Portland alone – landlords, tenants, and families on the wait list - are bracing for the impact of these changes.

The purpose of the local hearings was to give participants an opportunity to voice their opinions about the options HAP has suggested, or to suggest other alternatives that would achieve the desired cost savings. The key theme of testimony centered on the importance of the Section 8 program. The elderly, people with disabilities, low-income single parents, and the working poor all expressed fear that the program will be gutted and they will be left homeless.

The increasing cost of housing has serious implications for low-income families and individuals throughout the state. Housing costs represent a large percentage of basic

living expenses. Roughly one-third of Oregonians are now 'cost-burdened,' paying a much larger percentage of their income than the 30% considered affordable by federal standards. Oregon's housing costs have risen dramatically since 1990, far faster than the cost of homes nationally, and far outpacing Oregon incomes.

The federal Section 8 Housing Voucher Program provides about two million low-income households with vouchers that help cover the cost of obtaining housing on the open market. It is the nation's largest low-income housing assistance program.

Despite research by the Department of Housing and Urban Development showing that the number of people with severe housing problems has gone up, the President's fiscal year 2005 budget would cut \$1 billion from the Housing Voucher Program. The proposal has no money for new vouchers and would remove important resident protections, putting thousands of people at risk of losing their housing. Of major concern to advocates is that the proposal would convert the Housing Voucher Program into a block grant to state and local housing agencies, reducing already insuffi-

cient funding to the states. Under the Administration's proposal, these basic housing protections for low-income families would be cut:

- No requirement that any new vouchers go to extremely low-income people;
- the rule limiting tenants rents to 30% of their income could be eliminated;
- families currently using vouchers could be dropped under the new program; and
- local Public Housing Authorities would be financially rewarded for "graduating" tenants out of the voucher program.

As Congress completes work on the appropriation bills, they need to hear low-income housing must be fully funded. See this month's "Take Five".

Take Action with ease...



Check out Oregon Food Bank's web-based advocacy tool. Look up your elected officials, research legislation, and communicate your opinion on important issues instantly:

www.oregonfoodbank.org



ADVOCATE

Alarming trends contribute to the changing face of poverty

On November 15th hundreds of anti-poverty activists, social service providers, and community leaders will gather in Seaside for the biannual poverty conference hosted by the Community Action Directors of Oregon (CADO). This year's theme is "The Changing Face of Poverty". Given the growing economic crisis more families are finding themselves in, conference participants will have much to discuss and learn.

The trends are alarming. More than one out of four American working families

earn wages so low they are left balancing at the edge of financial disaster, easily triggered by one seemingly small event: illness, car trouble, or a high energy bill. The challenges Oregon's working families face are revealed in a must-read report by the Oregon Center for Public Policy, *In the Shadows of the Recovery*. This report takes the reader step by step through the multitude of pressures pushing more Oregon families into financial disaster. The effect of depressed wages and the rising costs for basic needs such as housing, medical

care, and child care are leading to a precipitous increase in debt. Increasing personal bankruptcies, home foreclosures, and debt to high cost lenders are just a few of the factors changing the face of poverty in Oregon.

Trends on the national level continue to spell trouble for working families as well. A recent report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes that for the 14th straight quarter, corporate profits are up while wages and salaries continue to claim a declining share of the nation's wealth. Total compensation – wages, sala-

ries, and employer-sponsored benefits – has fallen 3.1 percent over the 14-quarter period beginning in 2001. At the same time, corporate profits have soared a full 40 percent. This unprecedented trend threatens workers across the income spectrum.

For copies of these reports contact the Oregon Center for Public Policy at 503-873-1947 or visit www.ocpp.org; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities at 202-408-1056 or visit www.cbpp.org

Feed children in your community with federal dollars

Even in these tight budgetary times, there are still federal dollars that you can help bring in to your community to feed hungry children.

After-school programming is an important part of the

day for many children in Oregon schools. Whether they are getting help with homework, learning more about science, taking music lessons, or just having fun playing basketball, children in after-school programs are extending their learning after the school day ends.

Food can and should also play a big role in after-school programs. Providing food to participants can help improve their behavior and their ability to learn, especially if activities will keep them at the program late in the afternoon or into the early evening. Having food available can also help draw children to activity programs. And for the thousands of Oregon children who come from food insecure families, a snack or meal served at an after-school program could be the only thing that keeps a child from going to bed hungry.

The US Department of Agriculture provides funding to after-school programs located in low-income areas so that they can provide meals or snacks to children age 18 and under through the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Snacks or full meals can be served at any point during the after school program's hours of operation—even when children first arrive. In fact, after-school programs can serve both a snack and a full meal, as long as there are at least three hours between the time the snack and the meal are served.

To qualify for the USDA funds, after-school programs must be:

- ♦ be located in an area where 50% or more children qualify for free or reduced-price meals;
- ♦ offer some kind of enhancement programs to participants; and

- ♦ be operated by schools, non-profits, churches, libraries, local governments, youth programs, or other community partners.

If you currently operate an after-school program and want to find out if your program qualifies for a meal reimbursement, contact Darcy Miller, Oregon Department of Education, at (503) 378-3600 x 2613 or darcy.miller@state.or.us. She can help you determine whether your program is eligible and get you started on the application process.

If you have a child in an after-school program that doesn't provide food to participants, share this information with the program's staff.

Act today to help make your community healthier!

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

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