



# Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK  
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

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## take five

**Action:** Help us draft the 2007 anti-hunger state legislative agenda.

**Message:** In order to be more effective in highlighting our key issues, we are setting our state legislative agenda early for 2007. This way, candidates can be educated on the most pressing needs for low-income families. Your input is vital!

Two ways to participate:

1. Take the on-line survey by visiting <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=800601472313>.
2. Call Patti Whitney-Wise at 503-595-5501 to request a paper copy.

Thank you for your help and suggestions.

## 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

## Action in Congress threatens progress Oregon has made in reducing hunger

In early October, Oregon Food Bank released their annual statistics showing that for the 7<sup>th</sup> year in a row demand for emergency food services has increased. Between 1997 and 2003, the number of emergency food boxes distributed throughout the statewide network of hunger-relief agencies increased 10% a year. This past year, the network registered a 4% increase – not as much but still an increase. The steady increase in demand creates a steady building of concern.

Hunger is an issue that touches all of us from the Governor on down to the volunteer working in a neighborhood emergency food pantry. We are all concerned that one of our neighbors may be going without one of the most basic human needs – food. This concern is especially acute among those on the front lines of hunger-relief who feel their resources and capacity to help an ever growing number of people will reach a breaking point if the trend continues.

It's against this backdrop that Oregonians across the state received the good news contained in the annual U.S. Agriculture Department household food security report. According to this report,

Oregon was the only state to register a statistically significant decrease in the number of households experiencing hunger from 2001-03 to 2002-04. Nationally the number of households experiencing hunger and food insecurity increased. Oregon now ranks 16th among states for food insecurity with hunger and 19th in food insecurity without hunger.

So how can this be, how can we continue to register an increase in demand for emergency food services while registering a statistically significant drop in the number of households experiencing hunger? Michael Leachman with Oregon Center for Public Policy offers some insight.

He explains that the USDA report shows that Oregon has done an excellent job addressing immediate needs posed by hunger. An effective food stamp outreach campaign combined with policy changes aimed at helping more low-income working families access food stamps resulted in an 80% increase in participation between 2000 and 2005. In addition, the Oregon Food Bank Network has helped ease hunger by increasing food distribution by 50 percent since 2001, opening more food pantries in remote areas of the state and ex-

panding programs to help fight hunger.

However, increasing access to federal and community food assistance programs help alleviate hunger in the short-term; those efforts don't address the more systemic underlying causes of hunger. People are turning to food stamps and emergency food programs because they simply do not have enough money for food, and until we address the underlying causes of poverty, demand for food assistance programs will continue to increase.

The underlying causes of hunger are still very much with us in Oregon. We are not attracting enough family wage jobs. Housing costs continue to escalate and utilities, particularly this coming winter, will eat away larger chunks of people's income. Access to health care continues to decline and is leading to increased debt. Oregon Food Bank's 2004 Hunger Factors data showed that 54% of respondents had hospital or medical debt and 40% had collection agencies after them. Efforts to eliminate hunger over the long term must address these issues. Until then, we must continue to address the immediate hunger needs through federal and community food

*(continued on page 2)*

## Action in Congress threatens progress *(continued from page 1)*

assistance. However, those effective programs are under attack in Congress.

On the same day that the USDA released the household food security report, the U.S. House Agriculture Committee voted to make substantial cuts to the federal Food Stamp Program. If approved by Congress, Oregon will suffer a disproportionate impact because the cuts are targeted to a provision Oregon has used to extend food stamp benefits to more low-income working families.

Oregon is one of nine states that fully adopted a rule change authorized by the

USDA called categorical eligibility. This provision helps more low-wage, working families get nutrition assistance by giving states the flexibility to raise the gross income test for food stamps and disregard the value to certain assets such as a vehicle.

Income eligibility is based on two measures: first is the gross income test. Nationally, a family's income must be below 130% of the federal poverty line (FPL) to apply for food stamps. In Oregon, gross household income may be as high as 185% FPL or about \$29,800 for a family of three. The

calculation for benefits is then based on a household's net income which is derived by subtracting certain standard deductions (housing, childcare, medical, earned income deduction). After deductions, every household must have a net income of 100% FPL or less in order to qualify for food stamp benefits. So, categorical eligibility does not extend benefits to households with higher disposable income; it extends benefits to households with higher expenses 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 and undermine the success we have had in reducing hunger and food insecurity.

So as we celebrate the good news that we are successfully addressing the short-term needs posed by hunger, we must continue to express concern about the immediate threat to those programs and express concern that the root causes of hunger continue to fester in our state and need real attention from Oregon's policy makers and public.

## Federal budget update

Congress is in the final stages of debate over how they intend to carve over \$35 billion from human need programs. Earlier this year Congress passed a reconciliation bill that required \$35 billion in spending cuts

and \$70 billion in new tax breaks. Each chamber has been working on its version of how to achieve those goals.

The Senate passed their bill on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. The House Committees have completed their work so the complete bill will reach the House floor for debate as early as November 7<sup>th</sup>.

The Senate version is much better in terms of sparing low-income programs from the most drastic cuts. The House version forces low- and moderate-income families to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden with deep cuts to food stamps, Medicaid, Social Security Disability, and child support enforcement.

During floor debate in the Senate, Oregon's Senator Gordon Smith gave a floor speech outlining his support for key social safety

net programs. In particular he articulated strong support for the compromises made in the Senate bill that protect food stamps from cuts and protect Medicaid beneficiaries from direct impact. The Senate Finance Committee largely protected low-income Medicaid consumers by sharing the \$10 billion in cuts between both Medicaid and Medicare and focusing cuts on providers, not patients.

Here is an excerpt from his speech:

*Our greatest victory in this bill lies not in what is included in the reconciliation package but what we succeeded in keeping out of it. While all components of this bill are important, there are two areas that if done incorrectly would have unraveled the very fabric of our Nation's safety net system--Medicaid and Food Stamps.*

Senator Smith deserves our thanks and appreciation. Please take a moment to call his office and express your appreciation for his leadership in protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

Of course, the budget battle is not over. The House still needs to vote on their version, and then the two chambers will need to reconcile the differences between the two bills. Please continue to reach out to your House member, asking them to work diligently to protect the interests of low-income families in the final reconciliation bill.

For more information go to [www.oregonfoodbank.org](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org) and click on Advocate.

Thanks for all of your hard work which has helped us get to this point.

**OFB Advocacy Staff:**  
 (503) 282-0555 [Portland area]  
 1-800-777-7427 [outside  
 Portland]  
 Kim Thomas X206  
 Angela Martin X204  
 Cassandra Garrison X210  
 Julie Massa X267  
<http://www.oregonfoodbank.org>  
[advocacy@oregonfoodbank.org](mailto:advocacy@oregonfoodbank.org)

### The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force has moved!

Please update your address book with this new information:  
 4110 SE Hawthorne Blvd  
 Portland, OR 97214

#### OHRTF Staff:

Patti Whitney-Wise  
 (503) 595-5501  
[patti@oregonhunger.org](mailto:patti@oregonhunger.org)  
 Holly Wilkalis, (503) 595-5502  
[holly@oregonhunger.org](mailto:holly@oregonhunger.org)  
 Nancy Weed, (503) 998-6194  
[nancy@oregonhunger.org](mailto:nancy@oregonhunger.org)