

Oregon Food Bank sees hunger, poverty in Legislative agenda

Stephanie Tama-Sweet is a public policy advocate with the Oregon Food Bank, which is the hub of a network of 915 hunger-relief agencies throughout Oregon and Clark County, Wash.

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On Jan. 12, Oregon will begin its 75th legislative session. Oregon Food Bank has identified eight public policies that support food security and economic stability and will work to promote these policies in the upcoming session. First-priority items directly relate to feeding hungry people; second-priority items help eliminate the root causes of hunger and poverty.

First-Priority Items: Feeding Hungry People

1. Continuation of general fund appropriation for Oregon Food Bank Network. The Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services proposes a state general fund allocation to feed hungry Oregonians by supporting the Oregon Food Bank Network in acquiring more food donations, covering rising fuel costs and building statewide capacity.
2. Funding for WIC and seniors' farmers' market coupons. This program supports farmers' markets and Oregon

agriculture by providing eligible seniors and WIC program participants with coupons to be spent at certified farmers' markets and farm stands for fresh produce.

3. Free school breakfast in Oregon. This proposal would increase the number of children eating breakfast by an estimated 45 percent by eliminating the 30-cent-per-meal co-pay for children living in families that earn between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

Second-Priority Items: Eliminating Root Causes of Hunger and Poverty

4. Health care for children. Today more than 600,000 Oregonians lack health insurance, including more than 116,000 children. Adequate health insurance is critical to the long-term health of children and to economic stability for families.
5. Re-establish state's general assistance program as a bridge to federal Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability benefits. Oregon's general assistance program would support

Oregonians who have become disabled as they apply for federal benefits.

6. Continued allocation to support affordable housing. Oregon Food Bank supports the Housing Alliance in its efforts to strengthen the Housing Trust Fund, to build new affordable housing and refurbish existing housing units. This proposal also would protect manufactured-housing sites and help counties draft or implement their 10-year plans to end homelessness.

7. Expansion of Oregon's earned income tax credit to 18 percent of the federal level. Improving the Oregon earned income tax credit would supplement the wages of working families, especially those with children, helping them get ahead. One in seven income tax filers in Oregon would benefit.

8. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program preservation and enhancements. Oregon Food Bank will monitor proposals and advocate for investments in TANF that may be cut or reduced due to lack of revenue.

For more information about Oregon Food Bank and how to get involved in advocacy efforts, visit www.oregon-foodbank.org.

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medicate — they may try to quell feelings of cold with alcohol or drugs, according to Dr. Vicki Sands, an emergency department physician at Providence Portland Medical Center. Intoxication can impair people's ability to recognize symptoms or seek medical care, she added.

Though the Providence emergency room usually sees a case or two a year of extreme hypothermia or frostbite in the homeless population, Sands said, she was not aware of any during the December storm. "In these extreme weather situations, generally what we see most is falls — people slipping and injuring themselves," she said.

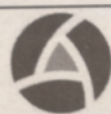
Portland's one-night count in 2007 found over 1,400 people living outside. A vulnerability study commissioned by the Bureau of Housing and Development last October determined that almost half of the homeless individuals surveyed were at high risk for premature death. Emergency warming centers, which open only during severe weather, can shelter about 300 people.

Sands pointed out that severe storms can inspire the public to offer more assistance than usual to people on the streets, and that may have helped keep medical emergencies to a minimum. However, she said, hypothermia is a risk even when temperatures aren't below zero.

"I think the big thing is just having enough shelters to keep people out of the cold," she said, "especially when it's severe like that."



By Bear



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