

Oregon Hunger Task Force

Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Members

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OHSU - Child Development & Rehabilitation Center

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Oregon Food Bank - Advocacy

Howard Kenyon
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Susannah Morgan
Oregon Food Bank

Representative Jeff Reardon

Senator Diane Rosenbaum

Senator Chuck Thomsen

Cliff Trow
Private Citizen

Sue Woodbury
OHA - Women, Infants & Children (WIC)

To: Members of the House Higher Education Committee

From: Patti Whitney-Wise, Oregon Hunger task Force

Re: Addressing Student Hunger in Oregon

Date: June 17, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the importance of addressing student hunger here in Oregon. Truly, assuring adequate food for students helps assure their success in school and in life.

The Oregon Hunger Task Force (OHTF) has helped to substantially reduce hunger and food insecurity in Oregon, bringing in hundreds of millions of additional federal funds to help feed Oregonians over the years. A paper by Mark Edwards, OSU indicates that our unique legislatively-created task force involving state agencies, legislators, (including Representative Reardon on this august body), and non-profits has had an important impact on food security in our state and is looked to as a model by other states.

Still, Oregon has historically been the Appalachia of the West and we have a ways to go. A recent visit from the Western Regional USDA urged DHS to take on a leadership role, in delving deeper into long-term solutions for our communities, while acknowledging the work that both DHS and the OHTF have done to date.

OHTF has focused on the connection between hunger and learning for many years and has helped increase participation in SNAP and Child Nutrition to make sure families have enough food to eat so that they can perform well at school and at work.

In the early 2000's Oregon was ranked as the hungriest state in the country. Together, we doubled down and brought our hunger rate down to 23rd within a few years. The Great Recession set us back some but we did not fall to number one again. We are currently around #17.

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However, college student hunger is more dramatic, largely because the cost of higher education and other basic needs has soared far above the annual cost of living in Oregon. And SNAP benefits are limited to students who work at least 20 hours a week or are qualified for work-study. These requirements leave a lot of students vulnerable to hunger when they are most in need of that nutrition. Success in college will help them earn more money in the future and provide for their own families.

We recommend that the state consider several remedies to help students afford the nutrition they need, including:

- Providing additional financial aid
- Lowering student housing costs
- Funding additional work-study, and
- Applying for a waiver or demonstration project so that students can qualify for SNAP if they work less than 20 hours but meet the income eligibility requirements.

We are happy to work with committee members in exploring these options for students to assure their well-being and success.