



**Date:** December 5, 2008

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## **Federal Help Allows Oregon to Add Staff to Busy Food Stamps Offices**

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SALEM – The Legislature approved a request from Governor Kulongoski today to immediately hire 60 new workers throughout the state to meet the increasing demand for Food Stamps.

Need for Food Stamps has grown 13 percent in Oregon since October 2007, and in some communities the increase is as high as 25 percent. The new positions will be targeted in the communities that have shown the greatest increase in Food Stamp applications.

"We need to be sure that every Oregonian who is eligible for assistance through the food stamp program has the opportunity to benefit from it," said Governor Kulongoski. "With the rising cost of food and other basic expenses, we must do all we can to make sure that families in our state are not going hungry."

Funding for the positions comes from two bonuses Oregon received from the Federal Government for exceptional administration of the Food Stamp program. The Legislative Emergency Board approved the Governor's recommendation for the Department of Human Services (DHS) to use \$3.1 million of the \$3.6 million bonus funds to hire additional staff to assist Oregonians in applying for and receiving food stamp benefits.

The remainder of the bonus money (\$500,000) will be targeted to joint efforts with community partners like the Oregon Food Bank and the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force to improve outreach and service delivery to seniors and rural Oregonians. "These new positions will be welcome relief for clients who have had to wait too long for benefits and for staff who have been overwhelmed by the increased need,"

said Erinn Kelley-Siel, Interim Assistant Director of the Children, Adults and Families Division.

The endorsement of the new positions comes as Governor Kulongoski joins other state governors in requesting that the Federal Government increase the federal portion of state Medicaid funding.

"Today's approval of the DHS plan to use bonus funds to hire additional staff is an illustration of how we must think differently and more creatively about using federal funds to help people in need," Kulongoski said.

Oregon's food stamp benefits are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card," which works like a debit card. Many working families turn to these benefits when their monthly income does not cover rent, health care, food and other basics. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, from \$14 to \$463 per month for a family of three.

Currently 258,600 households (approximately 499,000 individuals) receive food stamps in Oregon, or about 13 percent of the Oregon population.

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