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To: Members of the Comprehensive Revenue Restructuring
Task Force

From: Patti Whitney-Wise, Executive Director

Re: Refundable Earned Income Tax Credit

Date: April 24, 2008

I am here today representing the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and a coalition of groups concerned over the growing erosion of purchasing power for low-income, hard-working families. Our coalition includes the Oregon Food Bank, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Stand for Children, Children First for Oregon, Community Action Directors of Oregon, Coalition for a Livable Future, SEIU 49 and 503, Portland Impact and many more committed organizations.

In the late 70's, a full-time, minimum wage job lifted a family of 3 above the poverty line. This is no longer true today. Many families with two full-time minimum wage earners still struggle to put food on the table.

Oregon's refundable tax credits have proved to be successful in helping low-income working families meet their basic needs. The Earned Income Credit (EIC) offers immediate help to thousands of low-income Oregonians and creates opportunities for long-term economic independence.

Yet many low-income working Oregonians continue to pay state taxes on below-poverty wages. Oregon is one of a minority of states nationally that continues to levy income taxes on people in poverty.

These families need every dollar to pay for basic necessities such as food, housing, health care, transportation, and utilities.

The EIC has been called the best poverty reduction program ever designed, putting much needed cash in families' pockets to spend locally on basic needs—boosting the economy while providing for the families.

In sum, the benefits of the EIC are many:

- Millions of dollars will return to the poorest working Oregonians to help pay for basic necessities.
- EIC refunds will be largely spent by families on basic needs, including food and housing, in local communities.
- This will benefit local businesses and strengthen the economy, especially in Eastern Oregon and other lower income counties where over 20% of tax filers receive the Earned Income Credit.
- Lowering taxes on working poor families encourages work and helps ease reliance on public assistance by improving self-sufficiency and "making work pay."
- Family economic stability will be increased, helping children thrive at school and at home.
- The Oregon tax system will more nearly reflect the commitment to tax each individual on their ability to pay.

We believe it is imperative to include a substantial increase in the refundable state EIC in any tax reform packages that comes out of your effort. Thank you for your attention to this most crucial issue.