



2015 State Legislative End-of-Session Report

- **Protecting Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities**

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, through the advocacy work of its Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), supports Medicaid funding for Oregon's most vulnerable populations as well as funding for home- and community-based service options. This includes support services for adults with developmental disabilities so they can continue to live in their own homes and participate in community life. Throughout the 2015 session, the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland lobbied on behalf of seniors and people with disabilities. We pushed for higher reimbursement rates and for more money to be allocated to the Department of Human Services (DHS) budget.

As Oregon's economy continues to grow and the state economist continues to project additional revenue in the budget, this provided seniors with a much stronger safety net of services. The Aging and People with Disabilities program (APD, within DHS) assists seniors and people with disabilities of all ages to achieve well-being through opportunities for community living, employment, family support, and services that promote independence, choice and dignity.

The Legislature approved \$2,953,451,473 total funds budget for APD, which is 18.2% higher than the 2013-15 legislatively approved budget. About half of the budget growth is due to caseload/workload.

Additionally, the budget increases home- and community-based care provider rates for residential, assisted living and in-home agencies by 2.5 percent annually. *These increases in provider rates are great news for the Jewish Robison Health Center.*

- **Strengthening Food and Nutrition Programs to Help End Hunger**

This legislative session, the JCRC tackled food and nutrition through a two-pronged approach. The first priority addressed the ability to make work pay through increased job training and education for better paying jobs, as well as a higher minimum wage.



House Bill 3535 supports DHS using savings from declining caseloads to “reinvest” in improvements to Oregon’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program by making changes at all stages, such as raising the income maximum for families exiting the program and providing small grants to families as they exit. The bill passed both chambers and was signed by Governor Brown.

TANF is a cash assistance program administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS) for families with children living in deep poverty. TANF provides parents the tools to be job ready and supports stability for children. Parents/caregivers receive a small cash grant for living expenses, transportation and child care to enhance their job search efforts. They also receive job readiness training.

Another bill, HB 2015, directs DHS to adopt rules that allow families to continue to receive Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) subsidies for up to one year, even if they have a change in employment status, to allow for work-seeking activities. It also directs them to allow self-employed parents and those who are in school to receive the subsidy. The ERDC program is designed to allow parents to have adequate child care while they are working or in school.

There were also a handful of bills designed to increase the minimum wage either gradually (year to year), or immediately set at certain amounts. Unfortunately, none of these bills received the necessary votes at the time of adjournment. However, during this interim, House Speaker Tina Kotek created a Minimum Wage Task Force that includes businesses, labor unions, consumer advocates, etc., to look at several possible solutions and make recommendations for the 2016 legislative session. We will continue to follow the progress of this work group.

In terms of the second prong, the JCRC continues to focus on nutrition and ending poverty in our communities. One of the main focuses over the last few sessions, including 2015, is on school-based programs.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) administers school nutrition programs, including free and reduced-meal programs. Free and reduced-price meals are available for eligible students, and eligibility is determined by household size and income. The Oregon Legislature already provided funding to eliminate the co-payment for School Breakfast. ***House Bill 2545, which does the same for lunch programs, passed through both chambers and was signed by Governor Brown.***



In the last budget bill of the session (where they typically consolidate all the remaining budget pieces), legislators modified the Farm-to-School program to help increase participation in the program by school districts across the state. They appropriated an additional \$3.3 million to the Department of Education (\$1.2 million in initial budget) to help pay for food-based, agriculture-based, or garden-based educational activities in school districts. A percentage of that money is also allocated to school districts to continue promoting Farm-to-School programs.

- **Advocating to Protect Workers Against Wage Theft**

The JCRC continues to support legislation that both prevents the underpayment or non-payment of wages to workers and cracks down on violations of overtime and minimum-wage laws. We've joined the Coalition against Wage Theft and actively lobbied and testified in support of Senate Bill 718.

SB 718-A establishes and specifies the process for a civil right of action for certain wage claims. The measure: requires employers to maintain time and pay records of terminated employees for three years from the date of termination; requires employers to provide employees with sufficient detail in pay stubs to determine proper wages; requires employers to provide employees with written statements for the reason of termination; makes it more difficult for employers to misclassify employees or shift responsibility to a non-existent entity and standardizes the various definitions of "wages."

The bill passed out of Senate Workforce on a 3-2 partisan vote and was referred to the Senate Rules Committee. Regrettably, the bill was not able to secure the necessary votes by the time session adjourned and failed. We will continue to work on this issue in future legislative sessions.

- **Making Communities Safe by Reducing Gun Violence**

Several pieces of legislation were introduced this session to help reduce the prevalence of gun violence in our communities. The JCRC/Federation is a member and supporter of the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Gun Violence and actively lobbied and testified in support of Senate Bill 941.



SB 941-A, also named the “Oregon Firearms Safety Act,” requires universal background checks for firearm transfers in the state of Oregon, with the exception of transfers between close relatives. Eight jurisdictions currently require a background check to be conducted prior to any firearms transfer, including those between private citizens and at gun shows. This is known colloquially as a “universal background check.” *After a number of long-hour hearings and heated debate, the Oregon Firearms Safety Act successfully passed through both chambers and was signed by Governor Brown.*

Additionally, the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Gun Violence supported Senate Bill 525. This legislation provides that a person who is the subject of a Family Abuse Protection Act (FAPA) restraining order may not possess a firearm or ammunition. In order for the prohibition to apply, the person must have had both a notice and hearing before the court. Additionally, the measure states that if a person is convicted of a qualifying misdemeanor and the victim was a family member at the time of the offense, they may not possess a firearm or ammunition. This bill also passed both chambers and was signed by Governor Brown.

- **Banning the Sale of Electronic Cigarettes to Minors**

This legislative session, at the request of Senator Elizabeth Steiner-Hayward, the JCRC was asked to support multiple pieces of tobacco legislation. After much discussion and Federation board approval, it was decided that these bills align with the Jewish tradition of protecting health and the principle of *pikuach nefesh*, saving a soul or human life.

House Bill 2546 bans the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors. Oregon had been one of 10 states that allow sales to minors. Electronic cigarettes, often called e-cigarettes, are battery-operated devices designed to look like regular tobacco cigarettes (although later generations of the device do not look like cigarettes and are called personal vaporizers or electronic nicotine delivery systems). The bill also updated the Oregon Clean Indoor Air Act to include e-cigarettes, helping protect children from exposure to second-hand vapor. The bill passed both chambers and was signed by Governor Brown.

Another bill that was introduced by Senator Steiner-Hayward but failed to make it to the governor’s desk was SB 417, which would have required licenses for tobacco retailers and banned reduced prices and coupons.



SB 417 also sought to prohibit e-cigarette flavoring (like bubble gum or cotton candy) and would have upped the legal age to purchase tobacco/nicotine from 18 to 21 years old. These failures are disappointing given that Oregon remains the number one state for sales to minors.