

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON

RESOLUTION NO. 01-050

Requesting an Increase in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to the Federal Poverty Level

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners Finds:

- a. Approximately 14,500 Multnomah County residents receive Supplemental Security Income;
- b. Most SSI recipients are single adults;
- c. Individuals eligible for SSI receive a maximum benefit of between \$530 and \$550 per month;
- d. The Federal Poverty Level for a single person is \$716 per month;
- e. Current SSI benefits range from 74% to 76% of the Federal Poverty Level;
- f. Housing prices in Multnomah County have risen, with the fair market rent of a studio apartment at \$481 a month and a one bedroom at \$592 a month. Only 25% of people with a disability who are eligible to live in subsidized housing are living in such housing;
- g. The current SSI benefit is insufficient for recipients to pay for basic human needs;
- h. A recent survey by the Oregon Food Bank found that 22% of adults receiving food assistance were disabled;
- i. Most states currently supplement SSI payments, with the supplements ranging from a few dollars to several hundred dollars;
- j. In 2000, Oregon provided a supplement of \$1.70 to a single adult receiving SSI;
- k. This resolution is consistent with several County Benchmarks, including reducing poverty, increasing housing stability and prevention of homelessness, self-sufficiency of the elderly and persons with disabilities, and increased access to health and mental health care.

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners Resolves:

- 1. Multnomah County will advocate for the federal government to raise the SSI benefit to at least the Federal Poverty Level. The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners will send letters (sample attached as Appendix A) to Multnomah County's congressional

delegation and to appropriate federal agencies and officials urging them to raise the SSI benefit to the Federal Poverty Level.

2. Multnomah County will work with the Oregon Department of Human Services to explore options for increasing the SSI benefit in Oregon.
3. The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners will work with community advocates in their efforts to implement the changes outlined in this resolution.

ADOPTED this 26th day of April, 2001



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON

Bill Farver

Bill Farver, Interim Chair

REVIEWED:

THOMAS SPONSLER, COUNTY ATTORNEY
FOR MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON

By

Katie Gaetjens

Katie Gaetjens, Assistant County Attorney

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGRESSIONAL REPS

Representative Earl Blumenauer
US House of Representatives
1406 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Blumenauer:

On April 26, 2001, the Board adopted the attached resolution requesting an increase in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to at least the Federal Poverty Level. This is an issue of great concern, as there are 14,500 recipients of SSI in Multnomah County.

As you know, Multnomah County has experienced much growth and a rising cost of living in the past several years. We are writing to urge you and your colleagues in the House of Representatives to enact legislation which would have the effect of reducing poverty not only here in Multnomah County, but for the 50,000 SSI recipients in Oregon and for the 6.6 million recipients around the nation.

The current maximum SSI benefit is between \$530 and \$550 per month for a single person. The Federal Poverty Level for a single person is \$716 per month. Current SSI benefits range from only 74% to 76% of the Federal Poverty Level. This amount is insufficient for recipients to afford basic human needs, such as housing and food. Housing prices in Multnomah County have risen, with the fair market rent of a studio apartment at \$481 a month and a one bedroom at \$592 a month. While subsidized housing can offset high rents, only 25% of people with disabilities who are eligible for subsidized housing live in such housing.

As you also know, the state of Oregon ranked as the highest in the nation for food insecurity, based on an October 1999 report by the USDA. SSI recipients are, no doubt, impacted by this problem. A survey last year by the Oregon Food Bank showed that 22% of adults receiving food assistance were disabled.

The importance of raising SSI benefit levels was recognized almost a decade ago by the federal government when the SSI Modernization Commission, a body appointed by then-President Bush, recommended that the federal government raise the maximum monthly benefit to 120% of the Federal Poverty Level. The recommendations of the Commission were never enacted, yet the changes are even more necessary today as the cost of living has increased.

As a county government, one of our primary responsibilities is to provide health and social services to low-income residents of our community. One of Multnomah County's key public policy benchmark goals is to reduce poverty. However, like many local governments across the

country, our resources are limited. It is essential that the federal government provide adequate programs and funding levels to help alleviate poverty here and across the nation.

We urge you to seriously consider our resolution and work to pass legislation to increase Supplemental Security Income to at least the Federal Poverty Level. The effect would be to reduce poverty, not only in Multnomah County, but around the nation.

Sincerely,

Bill Farver,
Interim Chair

Pauline Anderson
Acting Commissioner, District 1

Serena Cruz
Commissioner, District 2

Lisa Naito
Commissioner, District 3

Lonnie Roberts
Commissioner, District 4