



April 27, 2001

Bobby S. Mink, Director
Office of the Director
Department of Human Services
500 Summer Street NE – 4th Floor
Salem, OR 97301-1099

Dear Mr. Mink:

The Department's Adult and Family Services Division (AFS) is endangering the health of recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), encouraging them to violate state law, and creating a beggar class among needy families.

As evidenced by the attached, at least one AFS office is providing TANF recipients with a list of "SHOPPING TIPS TO SAVE \$" as a part of a household budgeting training for TANF recipients. Among other things, that advisory encourages TANF recipients to "Check the dump and residential/business dumpsters" and to "Bargain for prices."

The fact that at least one AFS office is officially suggesting that TANF recipients scavenge from dumps and dumpsters may well reflect the fact that the safety net for families with children has shrunk to unacceptable levels. As you should know, the cash assistance grant and income eligibility for TANF have been frozen at the same level since 1991 and lag far behind inflation. Income eligibility for a three person family in 1985 was \$574; today it is \$370 in 1985 dollars. The cash assistance, fixed at \$460 in 1991, is now worth only \$357 in 1991 dollars. The budget you are advancing again ignores inflation and then further reduces the cash assistance, makes child care assistance more expensive and less accessible, and deprives many families of important job retention and wage enhancement services. Oregon's poor cannot make up for vanishing programs by scavenging for other people's trash, and DHS should not be asking them to do so.

In our economy, the suggestion that poor families try to "bargain for prices" on, say, essentials such as toilet paper, is insulting and tantamount to turning these very poor families into a beggar class. If they cannot even bargain for a better deal from the public agency that is supposed to serve them, how can they bargain for better deals from the private marketplace?

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State law (ORS 459A.080) prohibits removing recyclable materials from someone else's refuse container. Moreover, encouraging families to forage in dumps and dumpsters is demeaning and endangers their health. I would imagine your Health Division would object to your Adult and Family Services Division issuing an advisory encouraging this illegal and unhealthful activity. The fact that AFS is suggesting such behavior calls into question the DHS's commitment to the goal of self-sufficiency and DHS's concern for the dignity of the families you are directed to serve.

I respectfully request that you immediately make a public acknowledgement that the safety net is too small and that the agency has been wrong to suggest that TANF recipients scour dumps and dumpsters and bargain for prices to get by on the meager resources provided by your agency. In addition, you owe an apology to the women and children in the TANF program for the insulting suggestion that they engage in demeaning, unlawful, and unhealthful behavior.

Sincerely,



A. Charles Sheketoff
Executive Director

cc: Governor John Kitzhaber, M.D.
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
House Health and Public Advocacy Committee
Legislative Fiscal Office
Department of Administrative Services

SHOPPING TIPS TO SAVE \$

**From 1001 Ways to Stretch a Dollar by Vito Bennett and Cricket Claggett*

Buy direct from manufacturers/wholesalers

Shop discount department stores -

Go to auctions

Shop at thrift stores (Goodwill, St. Vincent De Paul, etc.)

Check bulletin boards at grocery stores, laundromats, etc

Go to garage/yard sales

Shop at church/charity bazaars

Check the classified ads

Shop by mail w/discount catalogs

Find special sales in newspapers

Shop do-it-yourself stores and do-it-yourself

Buy in bulk

Look for freebies

Bargain for prices

Barter or trade w/friends and associates

Shop flea markets and swap meets

Check the dump and residential/business dumpsters