



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Feb. 22, 2008

CONTACTS:
Sara Wurfel, AARP Oregon, 503-706-4634
Nicole Armstrong, O4AD, 503-329-3375
Rob Johnson, Oregon Health Care Assn, 503-347-0276
Ed Hershey, SEIU, 503-540-8428

Senior and disability advocates praise Legislature for commitment to vulnerable populations

SALEM, Ore. – Advocates for Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities celebrated several legislative victories last night as the Joint Committee on Ways and Means passed out a Department of Human Services rebalance package that included funding for several critical programs benefitting vulnerable populations.

“Thanks to the forward-thinking commitment to these programs by legislative leadership and the Ways and Means Co-Chairs and committee members, Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities can continue to access the vital services they need in settings that promote independence, dignity and choice,” said Rick Bennett, Director of Government Relations for AARP Oregon.

The committee passed HB 5556, which allocated \$12.2 million in realized savings within the Seniors and People with Disabilities Division of the Department of Human Services to assisted living and residential care facility and adult foster care services as well as relative adult foster care providers, developmental disability providers and Oregon Project Independence.

The funding package gained momentum through the interim following a significant decrease in access to Medicaid services for seniors and people with disabilities due to rising costs of care and increasingly insufficient reimbursement from the state. The problem was punctuated by the departure of 45 senior care providers, including assisted living and residential care facilities and adult foster homes, from the state Medicaid program, exacerbating access issues in many communities for low-income seniors and people with disabilities.

Also included in HB 5556 was a \$2 million appropriation to secure affordable housing for low-income Oregonians, many of whom are elderly or disabled.

Advocates also praised the passage of SB 1061 and SB 1089, which direct the Department of Human Services to develop a comprehensive long range plan for Oregon’s long term care system and evaluate Oregon’s community mental health needs, respectively. SB 1061, the springboard for senior and disability advocates’ success in February, was championed by Sen. Bill Morrisette (D-Springfield) and Rep. Jean Cowan (D-Newport), both of whom were lauded by advocates for exceptional leadership and commitment throughout the process.

###