

6033 Bills aimed at feeding hungry stall in Salem

SALEM (AP) — Bills aimed at providing more food for hungry children in Oregon have stalled in the legislature, and their sponsors are worried that the measures may get lost in the end-of-session shuffle.

One of the bills, which would provide incentives for more schools to offer free-meal programs during the summer, was approved by the Senate, but is still waiting for a hearing in the House.

The other, which would require more school districts to participate in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program, was approved by the House, but is still waiting for a hearing in the Senate.

A third hunger-related bill has fared better, passing the Senate unanimously this week.

The bill allows coupons from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC, to be used at certified roadside fruit and vegetable stands.

Tina Kotek, policy director for Children First for Oregon, said her group is "very frustrated that we're not seeing any movement on the bills."

In Oregon, 133 school districts each have at least one campus that could qualify to run a summer meal program. But only 85 schools and community groups sponsor the program.

Supporters of the summer school-meal bill would like to expand that by setting aside state general-fund money to give to the schools as an incentive.

Heidi Dupuis, a child-nutri-

tion specialist with the Oregon Department of Education, said that many students rely on the lunch program during the school year as their only source of food, and that their need does not diminish during the summer.

The other bill would apply during the school year. Only four districts that now are not part of the program would be affected: Alsea, Pleasant Hill, Powers and Lowell. The bill would not apply to districts that have fewer than 125 students.

Bill Gehling, who just retired as superintendent of the Powers School District, said that the district, southeast of Coos Bay and consisting of 150 students, does not need the program and could not afford to add it.