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OCC lobbies for tax credit

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Oregon's working poor need a break, the Oregon Catholic Conference told a state Senate panel last week.

The Senate Revenue Committee is considering a bill that would allow the Oregon Earned Income Tax Credit to become refundable in the future. That means a check will go out to households that qualify even if they had no income tax to pay.

Now, the credit is applied only to eliminate or reduce taxes that are owed.

"The next step is to move people not only from welfare to work, but out of poverty," said Bob Castagna, executive director of the Oregon Catholic Conference.

About 170,000 Oregonians claim the credit. The average amount is \$68.

The bill would create the refundable credit in two years and also would incrementally increase the amount paid, from its current five percent of the federal credit.

In a statement, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon supported the bill, saying low-income people are facing particular pressure from health care costs.

"We need to empower people with the financial ability to regain control of their lives," the EMO statement says.

One man from Lincoln County told the panel that his family is "\$3,000 in the hole" in state taxes. It is "ridiculous" that they get the federal credit but must "turn right back around and

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