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*Mission: To eliminate hunger and its root causes...because no one should be hungry.*

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Testimony in support of Senate Bill 349  
**SENATE FINANCE AND REVENUE COMMITTEE**

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Good afternoon madam chair and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today in support of SB 349. My name is Phillip Kennedy-Wong, representing the Oregon Food Bank.

Every day members of our network of 20 regional food banks and more than 940 local agencies see new people walk through the doors of their food pantries or meal programs. We see the havoc the Great Recession has had on Oregon families. And as these difficult economic times continue, we anticipate the need for food assistance in Oregon will continue at record heights for months to come. As of 2010, the Oregon Food Bank Network distributed 72 million pounds of food, over 917,000 emergency food boxes. That's a 17 percent increase from the previous years. The Oregon Food Bank supports SB 349 because it puts money into the hands of Oregonians who need it most.

Hunger is an income issue. Oregonians are hungry because they don't make enough to pay for their basic needs. Many Oregonians are finding themselves unemployed for the first time in their lives as the result of the Great Recession. They are showing up at food banks across the state. They are often overwhelmed with critical family budget decisions made under the stress, anger, and depression that come with being unemployed. Or they are one of the "lucky ones" with low wage jobs that do not pay enough to cover their families' expenses. Many are forced into difficult decisions about what to purchase and what to do without, such as food, housing, bills, etc.

All too many Oregonians cut corners to make ends meet. Every other year, the Oregon Food Bank conducts a survey of households that receive emergency food boxes from participating agencies in the Oregon Food Bank Network. The most recent survey was done in last spring. The objective of this study was to find out directly from the people seeking food assistance who they were and why they needed food. About 30 percent of households, that responded to our survey, reported cutting or reducing the size of their children's meals. About 76 percent of households reported not knowing where they will get their next meal.

The results of our last study showed that hunger in Oregon often impacts working families and children. For example, 33 percent of those who ate from emergency food boxes were children. And the majority of those receiving emergency food boxes had at least one member of the household who was employed or looking for work. And based on what our network partners tell us, today more working or recently working families are in need of emergency food.



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About 16 percent of households in the Oregon Food Bank's survey reported they are working full time and still in need of food assistance. Sadly this is not surprising. For example, a full-time job at Oregon's minimum wage will pay a worker approximately \$17,500 per year. The federal poverty level for a family of four is \$22,050 per year. So in Oregon a person can work full time and still be about \$4500 below the poverty line for a family of four. Clearly, this is the family that would be helped greatly by passage of SB 349.

SB 349 would make our state tax system fairer by crediting the tax returns of those Oregonians who work hard but earn low wages. Our survey found that 73% of households had incomes below the federal poverty level. About 64 percent of those households had children.

To conclude, our last hunger factors survey, Oregon Food Bank asked, "What would help improve your present situation and make emergency food assistance less necessary for your family?" The top two responses to that question were "be employed" and "higher wages." While this committee today can't create the high number of family-wage jobs needed by Oregonians, you can take a step to bring the take-home income level of lower-wage earners closer to that of family wages. Oregon Food Bank encourages you to support SB 349.

Thank you and I'm happy to respond to questions.