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Testimony in support of HB 4017
House Committee on Health Care
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Oregon Food Bank urges the Legislature to pass HB 4017 which asks a state agency to work with stakeholders to craft a blueprint for the Basic Health Plan in Oregon.

We believe our state benefits when Oregonians get the health care they need to succeed in school, work and life. Recent health care reforms have brought great progress. Last year we conducted a statewide survey of food pantry clients. The number of adult clients indicating they had health insurance increased from 36 percent in 2012 to 60 percent in 2015. We are making great strides forward in ensuring that everyone has access to affordable health care.

However, large gaps remain. 40 percent of our adult clients say they still lack health insurance. In addition, health care tops the list of creditors for Oregonians experiencing hunger. 39 percent of our clients surveyed in 2015 indicated they had debt to owed money to hospitals, dentists and doctors. It is clear that Oregonians struggling to make ends meet have a hard time affording coverage even with subsidies in the marketplace.

Focus groups convened by Oregon Food Bank around the state, documents the very difficult choices facing people experiencing hunger. Members of our communities are often forced to choose between paying for food or for medical care. Amanda, a food pantry client from Coos Bay, explains it, "there are no simple choices. I have health issues and need to watch what I eat. Do I buy healthy food for myself, which costs more money, and make my husband feel deprived? Do we put gas in our van or do we buy insurance? Difficult choices are made every day, and every day I wonder – are we making the right choices?"

Basic Health offers a solution to these address coverage and affordability gaps. It would ease the hard choices our friends and neighbors have to make every day. Basic Health would make health insurance more affordable for 88,000 eligible Oregonians, working to further close the health insurance gap for people experiencing hunger. We urge the legislature to adopt HB 4017 and have a state agency craft a "blueprint" for Basic Health in Oregon.