



Oregon Food Bank testimony on HB 2777

House Committee on Judiciary

March 21, 2017

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Oregon Food Bank supports HB 2777

With sufficient public will and support of the entire community, we believe it is possible to eliminate hunger and its root causes. Oregon Food Bank collects and distributes food through a network of four Oregon Food Bank branches and 17 regional food banks serving Oregon and Clark County, Washington. The Oregon Food Bank Network helps nearly 1 in 5 households fend off hunger. Oregon Food Bank also leads statewide efforts to increase resources for hungry families and to eliminate the root causes of hunger through advocacy, nutrition education, garden education, and helping communities strengthen local food systems.

Over the past few years, in focus groups and discussions with clients, Oregon Food Bank heard increasingly about the need for increased and improved transit systems. Without accessible and affordable transit, low-income Oregonians throughout the state struggle to get to their jobs, school, doctors' appointments and the grocery store. As a result, Oregon Food Bank has become more involved in transit issues, advocating for the issues expressed by our clients. TriMet's current system of fare enforcement was one of the concerns we heard about from the people we serve. Simultaneously, TriMet responded to similar feedback from community members and began to explore fare enforcement reforms.

Subsequently, in June of 2016, Oregon Food Bank partnered with TriMet to conduct two focus groups with food pantry clients to discuss their experience with TriMet's fare enforcement system. While clients spoke about understanding the need for fare enforcement, they also expressed a desire for a number of substantive changes to the current system. Overall, they described a negative experience with TriMet's fare enforcers and the court system. People spoke of the overwhelming amount of time and money citations caused on their lives and their fear of walking everywhere they needed to go if they were excluded from transit. One client told us that he or she lost his or her job because of the amount of time it took to handle the citation.

Clients shared that they wished that a smaller fine or community service was an option. They told us the reason they've evaded fare was because they didn't have the money to pay for it. If you don't have \$2.50 for fare, you definitely don't have \$175 for the citation. They wanted the ability to pay less or to do community service instead.

People also spoke about a desire to avoid the court system entirely. They expressed concerns about the amount of time it took to participate in the citation process at the courthouse and fear of losing their jobs if they took time off to deal with the citation. They spoke of the subsequent long-term concerns of supporting their families and paying for rent and food if they lost their jobs. They asked if there would be ways to structure TriMet's fare enforcement such that they avoided the court system entirely.

Oregon Food Bank thanks TriMet for listening to the concerns raised by our clients and for requesting HB 2777. This bill provides an avenue for transit agencies throughout the state to create an administrative

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process by which fare evaders can avoid the court system entirely. It allows transit agencies to reduce citation fines and allow for the option of community service in lieu of paying a fine.

People do not experience hunger by itself. Hunger very often happens because people lack access to affordable essential services such as housing, health care, and transportation. Oregon Food Bank urges transit agencies throughout the state to take advantage of this option should the bill pass. Oregon Food Bank urges a yes vote on HB 2777.

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

