



Partners for a
Hunger-Free Oregon

Ending hunger before it begins.

To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing
From: Annie Kirschner, Executive Director
Subject: Statement of support for HB 3398
Date: March 28, 2017

Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the Committee, my name is Annie Kirschner, and I am the Executive Director of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon.

Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon urges your support for HB 3398 to continue the work of the Oregon Hunger Task Force by continuing funding at current levels.

With the rate of hunger in our state continuing to rise, the work of the Oregon Hunger Task Force has never been more urgent.

Together with the Oregon Hunger Task Force, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon works to end hunger before it begins by addressing its root causes. The two entities' common goal is to build families' economic stability and food security so that all Oregonians have sufficient means and ready access to healthy and culturally appropriate food.

History

The Oregon Hunger Task Force was created by the State Legislature in 1989 (ORS 458.532). At the time Oregon ranked high for hunger among states, and in response the legislature dedicated resources and gathered a group of experts to tackle this issue, declaring "***All persons have the right to be free from hunger.***"

The Task Force was created to act as a resource within government, coordinating the "effective and efficient provision of hunger-relief services" statewide. The Task Force's members are comprised of 22 diverse private and public sector organizations, including bipartisan legislators, state agencies, the Oregon Food Bank, Meals on Wheels People, OHSU, Oregon State University and OSU Extension, the agricultural sector, faith leaders and other community leaders. It's a powerful group of stakeholders across Oregon and together the Task Force:

- Researches, documents, and raises awareness about the extent of hunger in Oregon.
- Coordinates the provision of food and nutrition services across the state.
- Makes recommendations for the legislature and state agencies for the alleviation of hunger.

In 2006, following the release of a powerful 5-year plan to address hunger, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon was created to support the work of the Oregon Hunger Task Force. The urgency of the problem and the opportunity for progress directed the members of the Oregon Hunger Task Force to launch a private non-profit organization whose staff would directly support and help implement the recommendations the Task Force. Since that time the biennial investment by the state has leveraged millions of dollars in private funding to address hunger and has helped draw down federal funds through expansion of nutrition programs like SNAP and school meals.

Accomplishments and Recommendations Implemented

The Oregon Hunger Task Force has proven to be a wise investment over time for Oregon. For more than 25 years, recommendations that have been implemented have helped the lives of countless Oregonians gain access to nutritious meals and escape poverty. Here is a short sampling of recommendations that have been implemented over the years:

- **Connected more Oregon students with nutritious meals at school.** School meals not only reduce child hunger, but also equip Oregon's students for success in the classroom. Kids that eat meals at school are more likely to graduate high school. The legislature implemented Task Force recommendations such as:
 - **1990:** Require all public schools in Oregon where 25% or more of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches to offer the federally supported school breakfast program.
 - **2009:** Eliminated the co-pay for school breakfasts for students eligible for reduced-price meals.
 - **2015:** Eliminated the co-pay for school lunch for students eligible for reduced-price meals, increasing access for 30,000 students.
 - **2015:** Launched a statewide campaign to increase school breakfast participation, conducting cross-agency outreach and a school challenge that helped schools serve 24% more children in one month.
- **Contributed to a significant drop in Oregon's hunger rate** in the early 2000's by conducting successful outreach efforts to ensure a higher percentage of Oregonians eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) were participating. Oregon's hunger rate went from worst in the nation in 2000 to 17th in 2005 because of these efforts.
- **Helped more families escape poverty** by helping to design a re-investment package in 2015 for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program based feedback from focus groups with TANF clients. The Task Force also recommended the state establish a partial federal match for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which it did in 1997. The EITC, along with the Child Tax Credit, now lifts 129,000 Oregon households out of poverty each year.
- **Closing the hunger gap for children during the summer and after school** by leading outreach and technical assistance efforts to recruit more local organizations to offer free meals through the federal Summer Food Service Program, while establishing a state "Expansion Grant" fund and increasing the per-meal reimbursement rate.

Oregon Hunger Task Force Goals in the Future

Since 2005 The Oregon Hunger Task Force has published a guiding plan to help the state address hunger. In February of 2017 the Task Force launched a new two-year plan containing overarching goals, its long-term recommendations and key performance measures.

Our first goal is to address the root causes of hunger so more Oregonians can purchase food. Economic stability is the most effective permanent solution to hunger and food insecurity. If all working families and individuals earned enough to meet basic expenses, the need for food assistance and other social services would be dramatically reduced. Oregonians also need savings to carry them through difficult times. When people are economically stable, they can rebound more quickly when faced with an economic crisis.

Our second goal is to increase access to food through nutrition support programs. People who fall on hard times face the challenge of making ends meet until their circumstances turn around. Some Oregonians, such as seniors on a fixed income and people living with a disability, will face this challenge each month. Strong nutrition support programs can respond to those who need immediate, short term and ongoing support to avoid hunger.

The full set of recommendations has been submitted as an appendix to this document. The full plan, as well as comprehensive research on the Status of Hunger are available online at www.OregonHungerTaskForce.org.

During this legislative session, the Task Force recommends that the state continue the investments it has made to fight hunger. We invite members of the legislature to look to the Task Force as a resource, both to learn more about the status of hunger in this state and to help analyze the impact of policy proposals on those experiencing hunger.

Oregon Hunger Task Force

Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Plan to End Hunger

2017-2018

GOAL ONE: ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF HUNGER SO MORE OREGONIANS CAN PURCHASE THE FOOD THEY NEED

Economic stability is the most effective permanent solution to hunger and food insecurity. If all working families and individuals earned enough to meet basic expenses, the need for food assistance and other social services would be dramatically reduced. Oregonians also need savings to carry them through difficult times. When people are economically stable, they can rebound more quickly when faced with an economic crisis.

Long-term Recommendations:

- Support accessibility of living wage jobs for all Oregonians through effective pathways for work readiness and practical supports for workers.
- Ensure reforms to Oregon's tax and revenue policy that result in a system that is stable, non-regressive, and sustainable.
- Strengthen programs that help offset living expenses, such as housing and childcare, for low- and fixed- income Oregonians.
- Connect all Oregonians to healthcare and strengthen medical-based interventions to address hunger.

Highlighted Strategies for 2017-2018:

Strategy 1. Strengthen work-support programs that help families afford basics like food, housing, and child care.

Performance Measure
Address decades of benefit erosion in TANF by increasing the cash grant for families, indexing the grant for inflation, or adding a housing allowance to help families.

Support working parents to ensure their kids have are able to attend safe, affordable, and quality child care by maintaining the availability of Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC) vouchers.

Institute a Paid Family Leave Insurance program so workers can afford to care for a new baby or seriously ill family member.

Strategy 2. Ensure that Oregonians in poverty are not taxed further into poverty.

Performance Measure

Increase the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) match to 18% (currently 8%).

Increase the federal EITC match specifically targeted at families with young children (currently 11%).

Release a plan to increase Oregon's EITC participation rate, which consistently ranks among the lowest in the nation.

Strategy 3. Protect access to health care for low income Oregonians through Medicaid and promote expanded use of health system best practices to promote food security for vulnerable populations (e.g. food insecure, chronic conditions, malnutrition, homebound, seniors etc.).

Performance Measure

Maintain the current rate of Oregonians with health insurance coverage.

Increase number of healthcare providers utilizing food insecurity screening and interventions with patients from 250 clinics screening 300,000 families to 275 clinics screening 330,000 families.

Evaluate current food security interventions for effectiveness and make recommendations to CCOs and OHA to scale up best practices statewide.

GOAL TWO: INCREASE ACCESS TO FOOD THROUGH NUTRITION SUPPORT PROGRAMS

People who fall on hard times face the challenge of making ends meet until their circumstances turn around. Some Oregonians, such as seniors on a fixed income and people living with a disability, will face this challenge each month. Strong nutrition support programs can respond to those who need immediate and ongoing support to avoid hunger.

Long-term Recommendations:

- Ensure all Oregonians can access food assistance when they need it. Improve outreach and delivery of federal food programs to underserved groups, such as people with disabilities, seniors, immigrants, rural residents, and people who are homeless.
- Increase the capacity of the federal child nutrition programs to ensure year-round access to nutritious food.
- Expand healthy food options and nutrition education throughout the food assistance safety net.

Highlighted Strategies for 2017-2018:

Strategy 1. Ensure all children have a healthy start by increasing access to nutritious foods.

Performance Measure
Increase the number of meals served in 2017-2018 by ODE Children Nutrition Programs by 4% over 2015-2016 by promoting full utilization of the suite of Federal Child Nutrition Program across the state and in identified gap communities.
Increase the number of school breakfasts served.
Increase the number of summer meals served.
Increase WIC participation in all areas of the state by 4%

Strategy 2. Ensure SNAP services to all who are eligible through coordinated, high-quality, and effective client support.

Performance Measure
SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) services have a higher completion rate, leading to increased wage progression for participants.

Number of state SNAP-Ed programs or local communities with multi-sector partnerships or coalitions that include at least five diverse sector representatives (who reach low-income audiences through their services) that address nutrition or physical activity-related community changes, such as policies, practices, or other elements of the framework.

A Federal Farm Bill that preserves the fundamental structure of SNAP is enacted.

Strategy 3. Protect and improve anti-hunger investments that provide coordination and deliver services to seniors, families with children, and people with disabilities.

Performance Measure

Funding for Oregon Hunger Task Force is secured.

Funding level for WIC Farm Direct vouchers is maintained and the voucher redemption rate is increased.

Funding for Farm to School and school gardens is secured to maintain recent improvements.

Protect vital programs for seniors by maintaining funding for Oregon Project Independence and increasing the allocation for nutritious food for seniors through the Nutrition Services Incentive Program and the Older Americans Act.

Funding for Oregon Hunger Response Fund is secured.

Maintain tax incentives to help farmers offset the cost of large volume crop donations.

Strategy 4. Support the Oregon Food Bank Statewide Network and partner agencies in building resilient, client-focused, healthy programs.

Performance Measure

Increase emergency food services in 10 underserved communities (geographically and demographically).

Increase total amount of produce distributed through the charitable food assistance system by 10%.