



Oregon Food Bank Testimony on HB2652  
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House Committee on Education  
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Oregon has a hunger crisis. Oregon experienced the nation's highest spike in its food security rate despite 50 consecutive months of state job growth. Oregon's food security rate is 16.1 percent (6th worst nationally) and its hunger rate is 6.6 percent (8th worst nationally). Oregon Food Bank's work mirrors this data; we are continuing to distribute food at Great Recession levels. Last year, the Oregon Food Bank Network distributed nearly 90 million pounds of food and served an average of 270,000 Oregonians a month. Food pantries and emergency meal sites continue to see long lines and overwhelming need from Oregonians experiencing hunger.

High rates of food insecurity are also impacting Oregon's children. Nearly 300,000 K-12 Oregon students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. That's about half of the student population in Oregon.

The ramifications of childhood hunger are serious. Studies show that hunger negatively impacts a child's academic performance, cognitive development, growth, and physical and psychological health. Without intervention, these impacts stay with children throughout their entire lives. Yet, household food insecurity is a situation that can be identified and addressed with resources such as public food assistance programs and charitable food efforts. These interventions can help prevent health, learning and productivity problems and increase the chances that individuals facing food insecurity can be productive and successful citizens.

Oregon Food Bank is committed to addressing childhood hunger through tested, effective programs and partnerships. Oregon Food Bank partners with local non-profit organizations to distribute food to families in schools at school pantries and during the summer at Summer Food Service Program sites. In addition, our Health Care Partnerships program seeks to improve population health by partnering with health care providers and policy makers to screen for food insecurity in a clinical setting, connect patients screened positive with available food and nutrition education resources, and work with health care and community partners to increase local food resources, food access, nutrition and gardening education for low income communities.

However, ending childhood hunger takes the whole community, including government, community-based organizations and the private sector. Notably, federal school lunch and breakfast programs are foundational to addressing childhood hunger. During the school year, they provide two nutritional meals a day to low-income children, giving them the fuel they need to learn and grow. HB2652 leverages these existing federal programs to ensure Oregon's children are prepared for and able to participate in the classroom. By supporting those school districts that serve Oregonians in need but can't quite cover the tab to make school lunch and breakfast universal, HB2652 offers an effective and efficient pathway to fight childhood hunger. The many benefits to universal school

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lunch and breakfast include increased participation by students, decreased stigma faced by low-income students and a lower administrative burden for school districts.

Oregon Food Bank urges a yes vote on HB2652

