



To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Subcommittee on Human Services  
From: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Affairs Director  
Subject: Statement of Support for WIC and Public Health Modernization (SB 5525)  
Date: March 26, 2019

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We envision an Oregon where everyone is healthy, hunger-free and thriving.

Yet one in eight families in Oregon experiences hunger or food insecurity - the highest rate in the Northwest United States. Food security is linked to positive health outcomes at all stages of life and even more so for the first 1,000 days from pregnancy through a child's 2nd birthday.

Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon supports Public Health Modernization, which includes the work of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). WIC supports prevention & health promotion by focusing on health issues that affect social, emotional and physical health and safety in the areas of healthy pregnancies, improved birth outcomes, breastfeeding, a healthier food environment, and nutrition and food security.

WIC serves low income families who are disproportionately adversely impacted by health disparities. Women who participate in WIC seek prenatal care earlier, have fewer premature births, fewer low and very low birth-weight babies, lower incidence of infant mortality, and breastfeed longer.

Participation in WIC helps reduce healthcare costs, improves nutrition and health, and prepares young children to be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. Yet there are gaps in WIC that Oregon can address through evidence-based investments:

- **WIC-to-Kindergarten (HB 2639):** Currently, WIC nutrition support for kids ends when a child turns 5, even if they start kindergarten closer to age 6. Expanding WIC services to bridge between a child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday and when they enter kindergarten and have access to school meals would help reduce food insecurity and help kindergarten readiness.
- **Additional Support for Moms Postpartum (HB 2626):** Nutrition assistance for moms through WIC is critical to supporting family wellness, improving health outcomes, and reducing toxic stress. Yet nutrition support for moms are cut off when a child turns 6 months or one year. Oregon should extend nutrition assistance to moms.
- **Protect the Farm Direct Nutrition Program (HB 3170):** "Farm Direct" connects families participating in WIC and low-income seniors with nutritious, local food. Without additional state funding outlined in HB 3170, however, 20,000 fewer nutritionally at-risk mothers and their children would be able to access fresh produce in 2020, and support for low-income seniors would be eliminated entirely.