



FOOD For Lane County

770 Bailey Hill Road
Eugene, OR 97402
phone (541) 343-2822
fax (541) 343-5019
info@foodforlanecounty.org
www.foodforlanecounty.org

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FOOD for Lane County is an equal opportunity
provider and a member of



United Way
of Lane County



March 25th, 2019

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

Dear Co-chairs Manning, Gomberg and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to strongly urge you to ensure a base level of funding of \$50 million for the Emergency Housing Account (EHA) and the State Homeless Assistance Program (SHAP) in SB 5512. At FOOD for Lane County, Lane County's regional food bank, we see first-hand the impact homelessness and unstable housing has on our communities' abilities to be free from hunger and food secure.

In Lane County, forty-four percent of households do not earn enough to cover their basic needs, according to Lane County's 2016 ALICE Report from the United Way. Thirty-seven percent of Lane County residents qualify for an emergency food box (Census 2016), and thousands more are one unexpected expense away from losing their home or not being able to pay for heat, food or medical bills. The economy is improving, but not for everyone. Food insecurity remains a challenge, as we see close to 70,000 unique individuals each year accessing emergency food boxes. Many people in Lane County and across the state continue to struggle because of low wages, reduced work hours, depleted savings and increased living costs, primarily with housing.

In Oregon, the cost of the family budget increased 34% from 2010 to 2016 — much higher than the 9% national rate of inflation. Unemployment in Oregon is down, but 58% of all jobs pay less than \$20 per hour, with a majority of those paying less than \$15 per hour. On top of that, many households work hard, sometimes at two or three jobs, but still cannot afford to make ends meet. Thus, hunger remains persistently high throughout the state, and hunger doesn't discriminate. All types of households struggle, but some are more vulnerable than others — especially seniors and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes, children and single mothers, and renters.

Many working families that we see in our programs spend half or more of their income on housing. The average Lane County household spends more than 60% of its income on housing and transportation. Without access to affordable housing, many families have to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table.

Moreover, stable housing is out of reach for many. For every 100 families in Lane County with extremely low incomes, there are only 15 affordable housing units available. Every community in Oregon is being impacted by the housing crisis. When housing costs are too high, families must do without other basic needs.

In Lane County, one out of three renters spend more than half of their income on rent. From our most recent Hunger Factors Survey from emergency food recipients, we have learned that in the past two years, 23% of respondents moved to find housing they could afford, 54% of respondents rent, and 14% are unhoused. Moreover, during the 2016-2017 school year, 2,373 children in Lane County were homeless. No child should have to worry about where their family will sleep at night.

We all need a safe, stable place to call home. The Emergency Housing Account and the State Homeless Assistance Program help prevent or end homelessness for our friends and neighbors. These flexible tools serve people in every corner of Oregon and help our community members meet their basic needs. The Emergency Housing account allows some of our rural food pantry partnering agencies to connect people to emergency rent assistance, preventing our neighbors from having to choose between keeping a roof over their head or feeding their families, or worse yet, finding themselves homeless.

Many of our partners who run shelters, including ShelterCare, the SVDP Egan Warming Centers, and Womenspace rely on the State Homeless Assistance Program to provide safety and shelter for our friends when their housing is lost, and then are able to connect them with pathways and programs to get them back on their feet.

The Emergency Housing Account and the State Homeless Assistance Program are proven programs that serve every county in Oregon and provide short term rent assistance or emergency shelter to help prevent or end homelessness. These crucial programs help Oregonians avoid having to make the tough choice between eating and feeding their families and securing safe shelter and stability. This is why we urge you to ensure a base level of support of \$50 million in on-going funds for EHA and SHAP in the OHCS budget bill, SB 5512. By making this on-going commitment, we can prevent or end homelessness for thousands of Oregonians, and better strive for a hunger free state. Thank you for your time and service.

Sincerely,



Beverlee Potter, Executive Director
FOOD for Lane County