

Regarding HB 2833 and HB 2834

Written Testimony

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House Committee on Human Services

March 3, 2021

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I wish to make two brief points today, informational in nature, that may provide context for your consideration of the membership and funding of the Oregon Hunger Taskforce. I am a member of the Taskforce, representing higher education. I am also a Professor in the Oregon State University School of Public Policy.

My first of two points is to remind you that the Oregon Hunger Taskforce is absolutely unique in all the land. No other state has had a team of coordinated professionals – agency leaders, community stakeholders, advocates, and program participants – work together like this for 30 years seeking to reduce food insecurity. Any other state that decides that it cares about food insecurity looks to Oregon for national leadership on how best to coordinate and improve circumstances and supports for residents struggling with food insecurity. Oregon was the first state, and likely still the only state, that has declared through its legislative process that freedom from hunger is a human right. And the state has walked the talk by creating and supporting the Oregon Hunger Taskforce. As I sit at the monthly meetings, I am constantly impressed by the quality of the conversations, the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance between groups that, honestly, in other states are constantly criticizing one another and failing to work together. The group regularly addresses challenges of inclusivity, or making sure that the right people are around the table. Any investment in strengthening the OHTF will add to Oregon's impressive successes at reducing food insecurity. When I say our successes I mean that an active Hunger Taskforce led us from a time back at the arrival of the new millennium when we had the highest hunger rate in the nation, to a few years ago when we showed the greatest improvement of all states in the nation.

This leads to my second point.

As a researcher, focused on food insecurity and hunger in the US, I appreciate that the OHTF is a leader in carefully studying economic, social, and program performance data that can inform good decisions. The taskforce cares about trustworthy scientific study of the problem of food insecurity, and proposing solutions that are rooted in that science. The research I bring which does not always yield happy news is always welcome by the parties at the OHTF. My unhappy report 4 months ago showed that in the last year one-in-four Oregonians experienced food insecurity during the economic downturn related to the COVID pandemic. That is around 1 million of our fellow residents. The OHTF has been unflinching in their willingness to face hard truths about the rise and fall and rise again of food insecurity in our state. The Taskforce has taken the lead at understanding food insecurity among particularly vulnerable groups such as communities of color, low income families, and single parent households. They, in cooperation with various nonprofits and universities, have been national leaders in understanding the problem of

food insecurity among college students and in suggesting improvements and public investments that can assist our college students. So I appear here today to applaud our state's long history of taking seriously the problem of food insecurity and its investment to date in the Oregon Hunger Taskforce.