



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health, & Recovery  
From: Annie Kirschner, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon  
RE: Testimony on SB 717  
Date: February 2, 2021

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*Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,*

My name is Annie Kirschner. I staff the state's Hunger Task Force, and am also the Executive Director of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. I am writing to support SB 717 and to help provide context for the need it seeks to address.

As we take unprecedented measures to protect our communities, our elders, and our neighbors, this legislative session should consider all possible strategies to ensure Oregonians have access to nutritious food during this crisis.

The experience of hunger, though always urgent, has become more widespread than ever before. An estimated 1 million Oregonians can't afford the food we need, twice as many people as before the pandemic. The rate of hunger is twice as high for people who face systemic inequity, particularly Black, Indigenous and Latinx Oregonians.

We're so glad that lawmakers are lifting up the needs of people utilizing SNAP and struggling to make ends meet. SNAP is the cornerstone of this country's response to hunger and currently 900,000 Oregonians have turned to SNAP to afford groceries (500,000 households). The current restrictions on what can be purchased with SNAP does leave many people unable to afford basic household supplies, and when Americans stocked up on toilet paper and soap last spring, this longstanding gap added to the public health disparity.

We support policies that ensure Oregonians have equitable access to the resources and opportunity we need to afford life's essentials. We focus on ensuring that nutrition support programs are adequate, effective and equitable when we need them. And we believe people most impacted by hunger are leaders in designing and enacting solutions.

While federal benefits have expanded since the pandemic to help meet the need, there are still many gaps, such as access to household items raised in SB 717. There are some people for whom these expenses are particularly hard, and a policy like SB717 could be targeted, for instance for people experiencing houselessness or those with children. Other policies to



consider would address communities who are currently excluded from participating in SNAP at all, based on factors like immigration status, unemployment or attending college.

As the committee considers the merits of SB 717, I wanted to share the broad policy recommendations that the state's Hunger Task Force has identified to address food insecurity.

We support strengthening access to nutritious foods by expanding "Double Up Food Bucks" through SB 555 and SB 440, a SNAP incentive program with a proven record of success. For every dollar spent on SNAP-eligible foods at participating farmers markets, farm share programs, and grocery stores across the state, shoppers will receive a dollar to spend on Oregon-grown fruits and vegetables.

#### Other priorities of the Oregon Hunger Task Force

- Reduce hunger in college by establishing basic need navigators on each campus. (HB 2835)
- Make eligibility for school meals consistent for all Oregon students. ([HB 2536](#))
- Ensure solutions to hunger are driven by people and communities with lived experience of hunger by updating the structure of the Oregon Hunger Task Force (HB 2833, HB2834).
- Maintain state funding for programs that increase direct access to food, particularly culturally specific food and assistance for those most impacted by the pandemic: Farm to School, Oregon Hunger Response Fund and WIC Farm Direct and Senior Farm Direct
- Be responsive to future rounds of federal stimulus. Prioritize gaps in the needs of our communities through the lens of equity, racial justice and urgency.
- Strengthen economic security through access to critical supports for childcare, housing, EITC, wildfire response and racial justice in public safety.

We look forward to continuing to address gaps for people experiencing hunger, such as the ability to afford necessary household and hygiene items.