

Written Testimony regarding HB 2835
Mark Edwards, Professor of Sociology,
School of Public Policy, Oregon State University
medwards@oregonstate.edu
541-758-3693

Chairperson and committee members,

According to my research^(a), the rate of food insecurity in Oregon households rose to approximately 25% by the Fall of 2020, having doubled in less than one year. This represents around 1,000,000 Oregonians who at some point between the beginning of the pandemic and Thanksgiving had to cope with the material hardships, health implications, social stigma, and psychological struggle of not having enough money for food. The estimates I have provided are conservative, not fully taking into account homeless Oregonians, undocumented immigrants, and residents who have remained employed but with reduced wages. These numbers are corroborated by service delivery numbers from the Oregon Food Bank.

Among those million Oregonians are college students and their families. Sometimes college students are parents themselves, caring for children, trying to feed their families while going to school. Sometimes college students live with unemployed parents, having moved home to find work and help pay bills. Sometimes college students are living independently but taking out ever-larger loans, less able than before to rely on help from parents who are struggling in today's economy.

In a survey we completed at OSU just three months ago, we estimate that approximately one out of four OSU students experienced food insecurity in the first half of the Fall term. In short, the food insecurity rate for our students was similar to what was the situation for all Oregonians. A food insecurity rate just under 25% is again a conservative estimate of overall college student food insecurity, focused on a population at one of the flagship universities. A rate of 25% computes to approximately 5,000 students at OSU in Corvallis who were food insecure last term. Many of those students may be eligible for SNAP benefits and other forms of assistance but often they do not know how to access those resources. And we can be sure that among less privileged student bodies at more remote state schools and at community colleges in Oregon the need would be greater still. The availability of student advising and basic needs navigators at our colleges and universities could go a long way toward getting our Oregon college students connected with the benefits for which they are eligible.



Footnote:

a) (https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/oregonhungerreportdecember_2020.pdf)