



TO: Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response
FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate
RE: Our Vision of Community Safety and Transformative Justice
DATE: December 4, 2023

Chairs Lieber, Kropf, and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is "to eliminate hunger and its root causes... *because no one should be hungry.*" We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today, and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

Mass incarceration is a root cause of hunger and widens racial disparities.

We deserve to be and feel safe in our communities, and that can only happen if we have systems that are just, equitable and protect our basic human rights. Yet a [study by the National Institute of Health](#) found that amongst households with a formerly incarcerated family member, 70% struggle to meet basic needs, such as food and housing. Amongst those returning from incarceration, 91% reported being food insecure, and 75% reported that it is "extremely difficult" or "impossible" to find a job– which can make it difficult to cultivate stability and ultimately trap generations into cycles of poverty and food insecurity.

While deliberating solutions to Oregon's challenges relating to addiction, we urge the legislature to consider that in the United States, **people who are Black and Latinx are between 3 and 6 times more likely to be incarcerated as people who are white for the same offense.** Simply put, there is a direct line from policies that over-incarcerate community members - many of which were intentionally designed to target people of color dating back to Jim Crow and Slavery - to today's reality that Oregonians who are Black and Latinx are more than twice as likely to experience hunger than Oregonians who are white.

Our systems need to address chronic addiction at its root, which means investing in real solutions that promote health, stability, and connection to community.

Oregon needs systems that support instead of destabilize people experiencing crisis. People need proven solutions focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and decarceration. We need to address addiction with a health-based approach and increase access and awareness to treatment, housing, culturally relevant services proven to work, and non-police responses to people experiencing crisis.

Everyone in Oregon who wants and needs treatment should have access to it. Yet [most substance use disorder service providers lack capacity to meet demand for services.](#) Right now, there is a **49% gap between the amount of substance disorder treatment that is needed and what is available**, and there is a 51% gap in healthcare providers authorized to prescribe buprenorphine, a life-saving medicine to help treat opioid addiction.

The situation is particularly dire for people living outside who face **long waitlists for detox services and transitional housing, resulting in cycles of despair.** And we shouldn't expect the police to solve social problems like mental illness, homelessness, or addiction. We know that harsh drug laws don't prevent addiction: 32 states have higher overdose rates than Oregon, and all of them have harsher drug laws. We urge the legislature to fully fund proven solutions like housing and treatment services and work on real solutions so that our communities can start the path to healing.

oregonfoodbank.org

Oregon Food Bank
Headquarters /
Metro Services
7900 NE 33rd Drive
Portland, OR 97211
503-282-0555

Oregon Food Bank
Washington County
Services
1870 NW 173rd Ave
Beaverton, OR 97006
503-439-6510

Oregon Food Bank
Tillamook County
Services
PO Box 1344
Tillamook, OR 97141
503-842-3154

Oregon Food Bank
Southeast Oregon
Services
773 S Oregon Street
Ontario, OR 97914
541-889-9206

Columbia Gorge
Food Bank
3525 Crates Way
The Dalles, OR 97058
541-370-2333

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FOR GOOD.**