



TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
FROM: Kim Olson, Community Philanthropy Manager - Campaigns & Network
RE: Support for Oregon Food Bank Network Funding Request (HB 5026)
DATE: February 15, 2023

Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, and Members of the Subcommittee,

For the record, my name is Kim Olson and I am the Community Philanthropy Manager for Campaigns & Network at Oregon Food Bank. I speak today with a request for the 20 Regional Food Banks in Oregon, five are run by OFB, and fifteen are independent nonprofit organizations. Together we support 1,200+ partner agencies and food assistance sites. We all work together as a coalition to share resources, information to ensure emergency food assistance is available to those who need it in every corner of our state.

At Oregon Food Bank we believe food is a human right. And we know that ending hunger requires a clear vision and bold action, with all of us working together to provide nutritious, culturally-relevant food today and to address the root causes of food insecurity in our communities. We've seen an unprecedented need for emergency food assistance in recent years. Today, there is no doubt that the rising cost of food and housing is again worsening food insecurity here in Oregon, and we expect as many as 1.5 million visits this year from people seeking food assistance – nearly double what we saw pre-pandemic. The safety net our Network provides is critical to keeping folks fed, healthy, and provides an important off-set to already stretched household budgets. No one should have to choose between paying rent and keeping their families fed. I personally understand the reality in making that hopeless choice, and what a lift our services can provide to those who are struggling. That's why I fight to end hunger, and that is why I'm speaking with you today.

The past few years have pushed our Network the limit. Our people - warehouse managers, truck drivers, volunteer organizers - from across Oregon, have continued to show-up and meet the unprecedented need, while dealing with skyrocketing operating costs and significant drops in the donated emergency food supply. We have scrapped by, thanks to strong private and public partnership - community members and elected champions have rallied with insight and energized support, demonstrating what it means to care for one another through the greatest hardships. We are now at a crisis point, and Oregon's Network of Regional Food Banks need your support to maintain services.

Oregon Food Bank has two fiscal priorities for the ODHS Budget. These priorities will help meet the increased need in our communities, and ensure food remains available to all who need it:

\$9M for the Oregon Hunger Response Fund to maintain funding for emergency food distribution efforts statewide. The Oregon Hunger Response Fund provides ongoing support for regional food banks and local food assistance sites to support food purchases, staffing and transportation. It is the primary vehicle for state support of Oregon's emergency food assistance network – helping to ensure

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nutritious, culturally-relevant food reaches hard-hit communities throughout the state. The reliance on these funds of our Network of Regional Food Banks, especially our rural food banks who don't have large private funding operations, can't be overstated. These funds help our rural Food Banks keep their doors open, trucks on the road, and pantries fully stocked.

\$10M to fund critical food purchases through the Oregon Department of Human Services. Widespread supply chain impacts, labor constraints, and economic and market shifts caused by the pandemic continue to disrupt the food industry. We anticipate disruption to donated food streams will continue for the foreseeable future, meaning far fewer industrial donations and less predictability. Prior to the pandemic, centrally-procured donations provided 25 million meals (30 million pounds) of food annually. In the current Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2023, we expect a nearly 50% reduction in supplies – losing the equivalent of 13.3 million meals (16 million pounds) of donated food.

The \$10 million in dedicated food purchasing funds included in the ODHS Budget to help fill this gap. Funds will help to ensure the Oregon Food Bank Network can meet rising needs, with investments in local economies through the purchase of nutritious, culturally-relevant foods. Funds and food will be distributed throughout the statewide Oregon Food Bank Network, building the capacity of low-barrier, community-based food assistance programs across rural, urban and suburban communities.

We are mindful as we make these requests that food banking alone is not a permanent solution to hunger. Hunger is not just an empty stomach or an individual experience. We are encouraged that the legislature is also taking action to address the reasons why so many people seek emergency food, including access to housing, child care, and addressing systemic barriers that cause disparities in who among us struggles to afford food. Ending hunger in Oregon requires an all-of-the-above strategy.

Finally, as pandemic-related SNAP allotments end this month, we know this will be a difficult time for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians adjusting food budgets at a time when the price of food is high. We want every Oregonian to know that food is available, and you can locate a Partner Agency near you at Oregon Food Bank's Food Finder: <https://oregonfoodfinder.org/>.

Sincerely,



Kim Olson

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