

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services
FROM: Susannah Morgan, CEO
RE: Support for Food for All Oregonians (SB 610)
DATE: February 27, 2023



Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, 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 through a network of 21 Regional Food Banks and 1,400 Partner Agencies in Oregon and Southwest Washington, and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

Oregon Food Bank Strongly Supports SB 610, Food for All Oregonians

We believe everyone in Oregon should have access to food, no matter where we were born. We envision an Oregon, and a country, with an equitable and just immigration system that ensures immigration status does not perpetuate poverty or limits access to critical support like food assistance. Yet there is a direct line between inequities in our immigration and public benefits systems and the fact that Oregonians who are Latinx and Pacific Islander are more than twice as likely to experience hunger as Oregonians who are White¹.

We are here today because we have an opportunity to do something about this. SB 610 – the Food for All Oregonians bill – is built to address barriers faced by Oregonians with lived experiences of food insecurity and the immigration system. In designing this bill, the steering committee of Food for All Oregonians (of which Oregon Food Bank is a part) partnered with immigrant, refugee and COFA-led organizations reaching 400 community members in 13 counties in 16 languages through listening circles and surveys. Researchers from Oregon State University (OSU) helped analyze results that informed the design of SB 610.

What we heard loud and clear was that far too many Oregonians face unnecessary barriers to accessing food. These barriers included limitations on eligibility for food assistance programs, language access, limitations of emergency food options and the feeling of dignity when asking for help. Our communities spoke, and together we co-created SB 610.

Oregon Food Bank knows from our own experience that food banking alone will never solve hunger. We often say we would love nothing more than to work ourselves out of a job. Enacting SB 610 would move us one step closer to that goal.

¹https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/oregon_food_insecurity_rates_at_arrival_of_covid_2018-2020.pdf

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SB 610 ensures access to food, no matter where we were born

SB 610 will make food assistance available to all Oregonians who are currently excluded from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits due to immigration status. This includes lawful permanent residents under the “5-year bar,” participants in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, community members with Compact of Free Association (COFA) status, people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Oregonians who are undocumented and people in the process of seeking asylum. In total, we estimate that 62,000 Oregonians are excluded from SNAP due to these exclusions.

Oregonians who are immigrants make our communities stronger. Community members who are excluded from SNAP are kids, parents, grandparents, college students, entrepreneurs, taxpayers and workers in areas including food production, health care and education.

While SNAP is a federal program, Food for All Oregonians is a state-funded and state-managed program that will mirror the federal SNAP program. The Food for All Oregonians Program will follow the same benefits and eligibility criteria as SNAP.

Food for All Oregonians will also make applying for benefits more culturally-responsive and welcoming by supporting a community navigator program. Community navigation is a highly successful model to ensure that everyone feels safe and supported while asking for assistance. SB 610 also takes steps to make the process of applying for food assistance more welcoming, whether online, with a community navigation program, or at an office of the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). For community members, enrolling in Food for All Oregonians will not impact federal rules relating to “public charge.”

Food Assistance Helps Kids and Families Thrive - SB 610 Extends These Benefits

Nearly 50 years of research consistently shows that kids who live in households that participate in SNAP have better outcomes related to health, education, and future earnings². We know, for example, that:

- Participating in SNAP reduces food insecurity among kids by one third after their families receive SNAP benefits for six months.
- Moms who participate in SNAP during pregnancy gave birth to fewer low birth weight babies.
- Participation in SNAP makes kids less likely to be in poor health and experience underweight.
- A recent study of kids who are immigrants finds that one additional year of SNAP eligibility early in life is correlated with positive health outcomes later in childhood.
- Participating in SNAP can lead to improvements in math and reading, and increases the chance of graduating from high school by as much as 18 percentage points.

² <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-works-for-americas-children>



- Adults who were in households participating in SNAP as kids report better health and economic outcomes as adults.

However, kids in Oregon who are excluded from SNAP do not currently have access to these benefits and experience hunger at higher rates. The experience of hunger and food insecurity for a child is not merely about the temporary sensation of your stomach growling. It's an experience of trauma. And it exists in the context of the sum of the traumas that happen when you're experiencing poverty. It can mean the stress of not knowing if you'll be able to sleep in your bed or stay at your same school if your family is evicted. It can mean living with the stress of a parent who sacrifices their meals so that you can eat. It can mean adverse health outcomes when families stretch budgets by purchasing food that is less expensive but perhaps with fewer fruits and vegetables. It can mean living with the toxic stress that is inevitable when your parents are working multiple jobs at irregular hours while worrying about how to make rent and pay the bills each month.

The impacts of this trauma can last a lifetime. Experiencing toxic stress related to food insecurity and poverty at an early age leads to early onset of chronic diseases, a decrease in lifetime education and earnings, an increase in depression and even suicide ideation.

First and foremost, the impact of hunger and poverty robs each individual of their full potential to flourish. It also harms all of us. Bread for the World estimates that the health-related costs of food insecurity and hunger are a staggering \$160 billion every year in the United States³.

SB 610 Supports Local Economies in Oregon

While Oregon Food Bank's primary reason for supporting SB 610 is because it will move us closer to the goal of ending hunger in Oregon, it's worth noting that SB 610 will also create meaningful economic benefits throughout our state. **Each dollar spent by a family on SNAP leads to \$1.50 increase in economic activity.** There are more than 3,300 retailers in Oregon that accept SNAP in nearly every community. Each each dollar spent supports jobs in grocery stores, farmers and food producers and workers throughout the supply chain. SB 610 is a big win-win.

In closing, we would like to offer gratitude to the co-leadership of the Food for All Oregonians coalition, including Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, Adelante Mujeres, APANO, the Latinx Family & Immigrant Wellness Hub, Micronesian Islander Community and Unite Oregon, and more than 100 organizations in Oregon that support Food for All Oregonians.

We urge support for SB 610 to help get Oregon closer to the goal of ending hunger for good.

³ <http://www.hungerreport.org/costofhunger/>

