

2/27/23

Yes on SB 610- Food For All Oregonians

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Melissa Carlson-Swanson and I live in Hillsboro, Oregon. I'm speaking with you today to ask for your support on Senate Bill 610, Food for All Oregonians. This bill ensures all of our neighbors, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need to keep them and their families healthy. When folks are experiencing hunger, navigating daily life becomes even more challenging, and when barriers to access to food exist, these challenges become insurmountable. Food is necessary for survival. We want our neighbors to not only survive, but also have the opportunity to thrive. Unnecessary and harmful barriers to access to food must be removed to ensure access for all of our neighbors. SB 610 is good for Oregon. I support it because I believe that all of our neighbors in Oregon deserve access to food, regardless of where they were born. Hunger was a crisis in our communities before the pandemic, and the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have fallen hardest on our immigrant and refugee neighbors. Immigrants, refugees and Compact of Free Association (COFA) community members, in particular, have long faced higher rates of hunger and poverty in Oregon. Just one example: Latinx and Pacific Islander Oregonians experienced hunger at twice the rate of white Oregonians pre-pandemic – and this gap has only widened as our communities continue to struggle with COVID-19's ongoing impact and the rising cost of living. Food for All Oregonians will create a state-funded program that eliminates exclusions to SNAP and make applying for assistance more welcoming. Food for All Oregonians makes food assistance available to all Oregonians who are currently excluded due to immigration status. It identifies and provides a pathway to removing these unnecessary and harmful barriers to food access. This pathway provides families with money for groceries that matches federal SNAP food assistance benefits and ensures that everyone is aware of this vital support through community navigation and outreach, improved language access and more. This navigation and outreach will further ensure that our neighbors will have access to the food that they need, and improve the opportunity for our neighbors to thrive, by building on successful, community-driven navigator models to ensure trust and community safety. We know that when we all have access to food, we're all better off. Kids do better in school, our families' health and well-being improves, and our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. This is true in every corner of Oregon – in rural, urban, and suburban communities alike. When all of our neighbors are getting the food that they need, all of Oregon thrives. Can I count on you to support SB 610?