



Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: February 27, 2023

TO: Senator Sara Gelser Blouin, Chair
Senator Art Robinson, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services

FROM: Lauren J. Herbert, MD, FAAP
Oregon Pediatric Society Member

SUBJECT: Support for SB 610 – Food for All Oregonians

I am a pediatrician in Springfield and a member of the Oregon Pediatric Society. I am writing on behalf of OPS in support for Senate Bill 610.

I speak Spanish fluently, and most of my patients are children of immigrants from Latin America. Many of the children receive SNAP benefits, but many others come from households where the adults are ineligible, or where they do not enroll because of concern this might hurt their immigration applications. For some households, the children's SNAP benefits must be shared with the entire family. There is not enough food for all.

Just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our clinic started screening for social determinants of health by giving parents questionnaires asking about food and housing. With the start of the pandemic, we saw an abrupt increase in positive answers, indicating that many were experiencing food scarcity and housing difficulty. The clinic has flagged these patients in our electronic medical record to be aware of these factors that affect our patients' health and provide additional assistance. Clinic social workers help connect families to organizations providing food and housing assistance.

As a community and as a clinic, we are doing our best to help the hungry families. The reality is that many families still do not have enough to eat. The indicators in the medical records do not distinguish between food and housing insecurity, but by examining the children in my clinic and looking through the questionnaires, I know that most of the positive answers are for food insecurity. Of the last 53 child patient visits, 24 parents indicated food and/or housing instability, 25 indicated no problems, and 4 were not filled out. We do not ask about the documentation status of the parents, though it's clear that some parents are undocumented. Food in these households may be scarce, with either no assistance from SNAP, or with food purchased through SNAP shared with the entire household.

Food insecurity and inability to buy nutritious foods contributes to many long-term health problems, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and disorders of mental health



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(NIH, 2022). In children, food insecurity is associated with decreased general health, and studies have shown increased rates of anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, aggression, learning disabilities, anemia, and asthma. Hospitalization rates and emergency room utilization are higher in children with food insecurity (Thomas, 2019; Pai, 2020). While we know of these physical and mental health effects, daily we see children in our clinics who smile and laugh, give us high-fives, and thrill to the gift of a new book. My colleagues and I care deeply about these children and their families. It is so difficult to know that many do not have enough food.

For the health of all children and the health of our communities, the Oregon Pediatric Society and I urge you to please vote yes on SB 610.

Sincerely,

Lauren J. Herbert, MD

References

National Institute of Health. Food Accessibility, Insecurity and Health Outcomes. Sept. 30, 2022. www.nimnd.nih.gov

Pai, S and Bahadur, K. The Impact of Food Insecurity on Child Health. Pediatric Clinics of North America. April 1, 2020. Vol 67, Issue 2. 387-396.

Thomas MMC, Miller DP, Morrissey TW. Food Insecurity and Child Health. Pediatrics. 2019 Oct: 144(4):e20190397.doi