



# 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: Angela Zallen, MD, FAAP  
Oregon Pediatric Society Member

SUBJECT: Yes on SB 610 – Food for All Oregonians

My name is Angela Zallen, MD, and I am the board president of the Oregon Pediatric Society. I live in Eugene and work as a pediatric hospitalist in Springfield. I am writing to give our **support to Senate Bill 610**, Food for All Oregonians, which would ensure that everyone in this state regardless of immigration status has access to an adequate supply of food for their families.

Food insecurity is one of the primary social determinants of health that has significant effects on children and their health. Chronic food insecurity is a source of toxic stress which has many deleterious effects. In children, this manifests as delays in cognitive development, nutritional deficiencies, and long-term effects on health including immune, cardiovascular, and psychiatric disorders.

In my practice, I care for hospitalized children and newborns; this includes many immigrant families, most from Latin America. I serve families that are very low income, and in addition to the stress and cost of hospitalization, they often also have to manage food insecurity, language barriers, variable employment, and lack of consistent transportation. Many of these families speak Mam, a Mayan dialect, which does not have a written component to their language. They often speak some Spanish as their second language, but accessing resources is particularly difficult for this community of Oregonians. All the families that I serve and the children I care for, particularly those who are medically fragile, deserve access to adequate food to keep them healthy. The inequitable practices of excluding families from accessing food resources is both unjust and indefensible. The effects of chronic toxic stress on health are known and widely accepted in medicine, but we cannot fix this in the medical space – in a clinic room or a hospital bed. We instead need to go upstream and ensure that everyone, regardless of their immigration status, has their basic needs met so that we can support thriving



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communities and prevent needless deleterious health effects of chronic malnutrition and food insecurity.

Access to food is a human right. In my work, I see a significant number of children with nutritional deficiencies, failure to thrive, and other diseases like diabetes in which nutrition is of the utmost importance to their health maintenance. I also care for children whose families are on the brink of losing jobs for missed work, so a hospitalization can put them at risk of housing and food insecurity. Taking care of an ill child should not be a reason that families cannot put food on the table. We need to care for our communities not only for the benefits of having adequate nutrition now, but for all of the positive effects of having basic needs met on health across the life course.

Food for All Oregonians will create a state-funded program that eliminates exclusions to SNAP. It would make food assistance available to those who currently cannot access this benefit because of their immigration status. It will provide money for groceries to families that matches federal SNAP food assistance benefits. It will also provide community navigation and outreach with improved language access so more families will be able to understand and access benefits.

My job is to help kids get and stay healthy, and nutrition is a vital component of this effort. I cannot do this alone. We all need to support our communities where they live, grow, work, and play. It is imperative that we leave no one out in this effort, especially those who are at highest risk for food insecurity. Immigration status should not have any bearing on keeping families healthy through access to food. This is why I and the Oregon Pediatric Society urge you to vote YES on Senate Bill 610.

Thank you for your consideration,

Angela Zallen, MD