



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

On behalf of The Latinx Wellness Hub, I am writing to express **support for Senate Bill 610**, Food For All Oregonians which would ensure all of our neighbors, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need.

The Latinx Wellness Hub is composed of the three nonprofits operating in Lane County, Huerto de la Familia, Centro Latino Americano, and Downtown Languages. Our combined nonprofit organization provides Latinx and immigrant community members with essential services. The support we offer includes adult education, English-language classes, mental health and substance use disorder counseling, small-business development, community gardens, and social service navigation.

Most of our staff share identities or lived experiences with our clients, and we know intimately the additional barriers to access basic resources faced by immigrants in Oregon. We also know that having dependable access to nutritious foods is a human right. Hunger is a painful reality for too many Oregonians. As with most social issues, the heaviest impact is felt statewide by our most underserved communities and by those who have been historically and systematically marginalized. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Latinx Oregonians experienced hunger at twice the rate of white Oregonians, which is a gap that continues to widen.

Our organization approaches the issue of hunger in our community by enrolling eligible clients for SNAP benefits and referring them to other service providers, such as community resources and food banks. We also host a well-attended mobile pantry which distributes fresh and shelf stable culturally relevant foods twice a month. But these services cannot fully meet the need for food access and security in our communities.

I hear from our clients that food banks and distributions are needed, but that they can only provide temporary relief. Additionally, food distribution events can be a challenge to attend while juggling employment, childcare, and attaining an education. Sometimes they do not feel that the amount of food they receive is sufficient, or that they do not receive enough of the foods that their families eat.

As the Garden Program Manager, I oversee six community garden sites. Collectively, the gardens provide nearly 200 households with the materials and information necessary to successfully grow and preserve their own organic produce. Participation in this program makes a significant impact on household budgets but it is time intensive, and it cannot provide access to staples like grains and meat. The pandemic and rising household expenses have put a heavy financial burden on families. I hear from many of our clients that they continue to struggle with food insecurity- that they struggle to ensure that they have adequate, nutritious food on their tables. We can't expect individuals to solve a statewide hunger crisis, and system-wide financial inequities, by working a full-time job, spending their evenings and weekends attending food box distributions, or as a part-time farmer. This is not to say that urban agriculture projects, and food pantries are not making a difference, just that they shouldn't be the only option people have.

Additionally, there is so much confusion and fear in the community about whether people are eligible to receive SNAP benefits, particularly in mixed immigration-status households. Many are wary of even applying for the benefits, they are misinformed about updates to Public Charge and fear accessing SNAP will jeopardize their immigration application process, or that of a family member.

At The Latinx Wellness Hub, we know that when all members of our community have access to adequate food, we are all better off. SB 610 will allow kids to do better in school, our families' health and well-being to improve, and our local economies to thrive through the support of local enterprises. This will be 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.

This is why we urge your yes vote on SB 610. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Gatlin Fasone Alshuyukh

Organic Garden Program Manager

The Latinx Wellness Hub (Huerto de la Familia, Centro Latino Americano, Downtown Languages)