

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

On behalf of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, **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 to keep them and their families healthy. Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in partnership creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world. EMO works with and for Oregonians through providing programming, space for dialogue, participating in community-supported political advocacy, and providing direct services for thousands of people through our 6 different programs to serve Oregonians who are immigrants, refugees, experiencing homelessness, or low-income — including what was the busiest food pantry in the state during the peak of the pandemic.

Hunger was a crisis in our communities well before the pandemic, and the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have fallen hardest on newly-arrived Oregonians. 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-pandemic¹ — and this gap has only widened as our communities continue to struggle with COVID's ongoing impact and the rising cost of living.

Through our direct service ministries, we provide nourishment and assistance to the group of Oregonians that would benefit from this bill. We often see our clients with SOAR Legal Services and Northeast Emergency Food Pantry struggle with affording food on top of other expenses due to their current immigration status. This bill will allow kids to do better in school, our families' health and well-being improves, and our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. 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. We support SB 610 to give more Oregonians access food assistance programs without their legal status being a barrier to feeding their families.

For these reasons, we urge your yes vote on SB 610 to bring more food security to all Oregonians - regardless of their status.

Sincerely,
Kim Wagner

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