



**Martha Sonato**  
Legislative Advocate  
971.801.5031  
msonato@oregonlawcenter.org  
522 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 812  
Portland, OR 97204

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**Senate Committee on Human Services**

*Testimony in support of SB 610*

2/27/2023

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

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center. I am writing to express **support for Senate Bill 610**, Food for All Oregonians which would ensure all our neighbors, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need to keep them and their families healthy.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. OLC is committed to efforts designed to remove systemic barriers to economic security and people's ability to take care of themselves and their families. Many of our clients have incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide the necessities for themselves and their family.

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 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's ongoing impact and the rising cost of living.

At the Oregon Law Center, we have a dedicated public benefits line that helps low-income people with Safety Net benefits, such as the Oregon health plan, Coordinated Care health benefits, Unemployment Insurance, TANF, SNAP (formerly food stamps), Social Security, and many more. We also answer questions about how immigration status affects eligibility for public benefits. We join the many organizations in support of food for all in efforts to ensure that where we're from doesn't exclude us from Oregon's safety net — toward a future where immigration status no longer drives hunger and poverty in our communities.

SB 610 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 thank this committee for your time and attention on this important matter. We urge your yes vote on SB 610. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Martha Sonato