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Testimony in support of SB 856

Senate Committee on Human Services

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AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With over 500,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment.

AARP Supports SB 856. This law is part of fixing the obligation we have to provide benefits to Compacts of Free Association (COFA) citizens (individuals from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau). These citizens have unique relationship with the United States. In exchange for permitting the U.S. exclusive use and military strategic positioning in the Pacific, COFA citizens were given the right to travel, life and work in the U.S. And as part of that compact, COFA citizens were promised access to Medicaid. However, as a result of 1996 law on welfare, COFA citizens were prevented from accessing most federal benefits including Medicaid and SNAP. Some have reported this is a drafting error. SB 856 allows us to meet our obligation. As noted in the staff measure summary, Oregon is the home of the third largest population of COFA citizens.

The Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest domestic nutrition assistance program for individuals and families who meet certain income and asset thresholds. In 2020, nearly 9.5 million Americans ages 50 and older (about 8%) were food insecure. In Oregon about 85,000 Oregonians 50+ (5.5%) were food insecure. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant increases in food insecurity for older adults.

Older adults face ongoing challenges and life disruptions that may compromise their ability to afford food. Food-insecurity can lead to older adults engaging in economic trade-offs, sacrificing their food budget to pay for other necessities, such as rent or other housing costs, transportation, or medical bills. The ripple effect is profound and older adults with food insecurity are more likely to have life changing health conditions. Access to SNAP has been linked to better health outcomes, reduced hospital and nursing home admissions.

We are pleased to add our voice in support and urge Committee to pass SB 856.