

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

My name is Meredith Wadlington and I live in Southeast Portland. I am writing in **support of 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.

Since moving to Oregon a few years ago, I've been lucky enough to spend time with members of our state's rich immigrant communities. I don't have to tell you that folks who move to Oregon from other countries do so to do exactly because of what we often describe as deeply American values – a love of family, of community, and of the American Dream. I've been a recipient of SNAP benefits myself in Oregon. I'm proud to live in a state that values and respects its poor and working class citizens. But I am disappointed that folks who want the exact same thing as me – to work hard and provide for their families – are unable to access the benefits that have saved me from housing insecurity, job insecurity, and hunger.

When we deprive our immigrant neighbors of the opportunity to make a meaningful life here in Oregon, we deny the very values upon which our nation was built. I've seen immigrant friends and neighbors struggle to put food on their tables for their children, longing for the same benefits that allow me to provide for my family. I have no doubt that you too have known and been impacted by members of our immigrant community. Senate Bill 610 would simply extend the care that we show to poor and working class Oregon citizens to all residents in our state.

Hunger was a crisis in our communities 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.

Food for All Oregonians will create a state-funded program that eliminates exclusions to SNAP and make applying for assistance more welcoming. We know that food security is a cornerstone upon which to build a better future and contribute meaningfully to our

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

Oregon economy. When people struggle to feed themselves and their families, often we see ramifications such as struggles to do meaningful work, perform in school, or participate in our community.

Food For All Oregonians makes food assistance available to all Oregonians who are currently excluded due to immigration status. Simply put, Senate Bill 610 is vital to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

We know that when we all have access to food, we're all better off. Kids do better in school, our families' health and well-being improves, and our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. This is 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 I am urging your yes vote on SB 610. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Meredith Wadlington