

Submitter: Juell Towns

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB610

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

I'm sharing this letter with you all today to express my unwavering 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 themselves and their families fed .

We know that hunger has long been a crisis in our communities, even before the pandemic; the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have especially fallen hard on newly-arrived Oregonians. Black People, Indigenous People, People of Color, People who are Immigrants, People who are refugees and members of the Compact of Free Association (COFA) community, in particular, have endured higher rates of hunger and impoverishment in Oregon. For example: Latinx and Pacific Islander Oregonians experienced hunger at twice the rate of white Oregonians pre-pandemic. This gap rapidly widens as our communities continue to navigate through the barriers that arise while navigating through multiple systems of oppression in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing impacts and the rising cost of living.

I'm a birth doula and reproductive care advocate who works with birthing people (and their families) who have and continue to experience hunger and its health and social implications. During pregnancy and in life in general, people shouldn't have to choose between having a roof over their head or food in their bellies. Food access and reproductive health outcomes are strongly intertwined, and so when we look at rates of maternal and infant mortality, we have to ask ourselves "what could have been done to prevent these losses"? Pre-existing adverse health conditions and adverse health conditions that rise during the perinatal period are extremely dangerous for birthing people and their baby/babies. Many health conditions that birthing people experience are exacerbated by lack of food access, more specifically lack of access to nutritious, substantial, fresh, culturally specific & celebratory foods. Food nourishes us, and many types of foods can either aid or hinder our health and so I believe that those of us with privilege have an onus to help improve the lived and material conditions for birthing people who are burdened with food inaccessibility (doing so in ways that these folks determine are best for themselves and their families). The goal is to raise up the future generations to be agents of change and to know that they deserve to thrive in this life with ease, not struggle to survive.

As previously mentioned, we know that when we all have access to food, we're all better off. SB 610 will give children the freedom to immerse themselves in learning rather than spend their days worrying where their next meal will come from. SB 610 will also support family health and well-being, and will improve economies in ways that create conditions for local businesses to prosper. 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 shines.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote YES on SB 610.

With gratitude,

Juell Towns