



NeighborImpact

Supporting People, Strengthening Communities.

March 2, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Please Support Emergency Food Purchasing (HB 5045)

Chair Girod, Chair Holvey, Members of the Subcommittee: (Special shout outs to my own local representative, Rep. Breese-Iverson, Rep. Smith with whom I worked in economic development many years ago when we both were starting in the economic development arena and to my former county commissioner colleague, Sen. Hansell.)

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request for support of local food banks. I am the Executive Director for NeighborImpact. Among the services that we offer our community, we are the regional food bank. We distribute food through 57 partner organizations in our region. We work with 17 local food outlets including every grocery store to gather and redistribute local excess food. We also receive federal commodities and small allocation of funding from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and we receive and purchase food from the Oregon Food Bank and local food outlets.

Before COVID, we were serving 16,000 people per month. Economic forces beyond most households' control or ability to adapt, including rising rent, childcare costs and inflation, have driven significantly more people to area food banks. Today, we are serving 60,000 people monthly or more. Last year, we provided food to individuals 624,004 times, which is an average of 52,000 people monthly. This would include individuals who receive SNAP benefits that pay for food for part of the month and individuals who are not eligible for SNAP. Food recipients of working age are mostly employed and use the food pantries to make ends meet.

The growth in food demand has severely challenged our organization. We are now spending \$33,000 to \$35,000 per month to purchase food to supplement donations and federal- and state-contributed food. That compares to the negligible expenditures made re-

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COVID. To pay for this, we have drawn down a designated reserve fund used to even out peaks in demand by 75 percent. I will be entirely gone by fiscal year end in June. We have doubled our fundraising, goals, which not only support food but also must pay staff salaries, fuel for trucks to run the food around and the costs of warehousing and heating and cooling (industrial freezers and coolers are not inexpensive to operate.)

With the repeal of emergency SNAP benefits on March 1, 2023, the average Central Oregon household experienced a 31% reduction in monthly food benefits. The overall reduction in cash being distributed to households in Central Oregon is around \$3 million. A total of 17,047 households comprised of 30,439 individuals are going to show up at local area food banks to ask for nutrition assistance this month, and those food banks are going to ask for more supply from the regional food bank.

The Oregon Food Bank's request for \$7.5 million to provide for the purchase of emergency food to regional food banks is very timely. For Central Oregon, we would receive an estimated \$187,500 for food and an equal amount would be placed on deposit at Oregon Food Bank to support large-volume commodity purchase for redistribution to participating regional food banks. This may seem like "small potatoes" (no pun intended) in a government that spends money in \$100 million appropriations, but it would go far toward easing hunger in our region for about a quarter of the constituents who live in this region.

\$7,500,000 will allow Oregon Food Bank to bridge the gap in food supply by purchasing, and distributing across Oregon, approximately 6,300,000 million pounds of food (or 5,229,000 meals) through the OFB Network. Across our state, this would provide a layer of protection against hunger and other economic risks for families already struggling.

Our local food systems were never designed to operate at the current scale demanded of us. Faith and philanthropy organizations were generous in responding to the COVID emergency and continue to do amazing work around homeless intervention and in other human service areas. But their resources are limited.

A state-funded intervention to create more capacity for feeding hungry Oregonians, both now and in the future is critical to preventing Oregon from regaining its reputation from a few years ago as the "hungriest state in the nation." Much work was done successfully to overcome that unwanted designation. We strongly request and urge your support for HB 5045 supporting for Emergency Food Purchasing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott Cooper".

Executive Director
NeighborImpact