



TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
FROM: Marcee Champion, Food Programs Director, ACCESS  
RE: State Budget  
DATE: April 20, 2023

Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marcee Champion, and I am the Food Programs Director for the Regional Food Bank at ACCESS in Jackson County. ACCESS is the Community Action Agency for the county, serving the most vulnerable members of our community, including veterans, senior citizens, and children. These individuals and families often face significant challenges in meeting their basic needs, including access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food.

As a Regional Food Bank, we see firsthand the effects of hunger in our community. Children who are hungry struggle to concentrate in school and may experience developmental delays. Senior citizens who are hungry are more likely to experience health problems and require costly medical care. Veterans who are hungry may struggle with physical and mental health issues related to their service.

**The need for food assistance has increased significantly in our region in recent months.** Our food bank has seen a **44% increase in pantry visits in the past year**, and we expect this trend to continue for the foreseeable future. **In fact, since the beginning of 2023, we have experienced high water marks for pantry visits, edging past 10,000 in January and exceeding 13,000 in March.** As need in our community continues to increase, we need help to keep up with the rising demand for food assistance.

As part of the Oregon Food Bank Network, **I urge you to support OFB's budget requests for \$9 million for the Oregon Hunger Response Fund, \$10 million to fund food purchases through the Oregon Department of Human Services, and a one-time infrastructure investment of \$22 million for Regional Food Banks.** Allocating funds to support food assistance programs and infrastructure investments will help us to meet the growing demand for food assistance in our region, which will help provide an offset for families already experiencing stretched household budgets. By investing in these programs, we can ensure that everyone in our community has access to the food they need to thrive.

**OHRF is a critical source of funding for us here in Jackson County.** As nearly every organization and business is experiencing, we have seen an increase in operational costs, including fuel, staff salaries, and maintenance. **Feeding over 40,000 people a year requires reliable transportation and staff.** Without OHRF funding this would be a much greater struggle for us and would cause us to have to divert needed resources from other areas.

In addition, **I strongly support the allocation of \$10 million for food purchases through the Oregon Department of Human Services.** This funding would enable us to access more food and provide a wider variety of fresh and nutritious options for our clients. It would also help us to



continue to partner with local farmers, producers, and grocers, **which would support Oregon's food systems economy while providing healthy food options to our clients.**

Finally, **I urge you to allocate \$22 million for infrastructure investments to help Regional Food Banks.** Even prior to the pandemic, the ACCESS Food Bank was operating in very tight quarters considering the number of people served. Since then, with the pandemic, fires, and economic instability, our capacity in the warehouse has reached critical mass. **We have at times operated at 120% capacity, storing some of our food in trailers in our parking lot and at a rented warehouse.** With the support of our board and leadership, we are planning to move the Nutrition Department to a new location, and this funding from the state would significantly help us with this move as well as helping us improve other aspects of our infrastructure, technology, and capacity building that are difficult to fund through other sources.

By investing in these three budget priorities, the legislature can ensure that everyone in our community has access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. This is not only the right thing to do, but it is also essential for the health and wellbeing of our communities. Hunger has devastating impacts on individuals and families, and we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this critical issue.

Hunger is a pervasive problem in our state and has devastating short- and long-term impacts. No one should have to go without food or struggle to put food on the table for themselves or their families. Today, there is no doubt that the rising cost of food and housing is again worsening food insecurity here in Oregon as families who are struggling financially are forced to choose between food and other critical needs such as health care, utilities, or housing.

I am encouraged that the legislature is also taking action to address the reasons why so many people seek emergency food, including access to housing, childcare, and addressing systemic barriers that cause disparities in who among us struggles to afford food. Ending hunger in Oregon requires an all-of-the-above strategy.

I urge you to support these important requests. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Marcee Champion  
Food Programs Director  
ACCESS