



April 8, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means
From: Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Re: Support for SB 610

Chairs Steiner and Sanchez; Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg and Smith; Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 610, Food for All Oregonians. My name is Angelita Morillo and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO). PHFO is a statewide anti-poverty advocacy organization with a small staff of under 15 members. We understand that leadership comes from those with lived experience and that hunger and poverty do not exist on their own, but rather a result of overlapping systems of oppression that create layers of privilege and inequity. Our values and work are centered in creating systemic changes to end hunger. At Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, we do not seek to just feed our neighbors, we seek our shared liberation from systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, cissexism and other forms of violence, which will allow all to thrive. We believe every Oregonian deserves to feel safe and be treated with dignity.

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 (SB 610), will make food assistance available to all Oregonians who are currently excluded from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits due to immigration status. While SNAP is a federal program, Food for All Oregonians is a state-funded and state-managed program that will mirror the federal SNAP program in order to extend the same benefits to immigrants, refugees and Compacts of Free Association (COFA) citizens that don't currently qualify.

Food for All Oregonians will make applying for benefits more culturally-responsive and welcoming by including a Community Navigator program, to ensure outreach to community members is based on trust, support, and safety. Individuals would be able to reach out to navigators for information, assistance applying, and the screening/eligibility process.

1

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

Currently, 62,000 Oregonians are excluded from food assistance programs due to immigration status. SB 610 will affect Oregonians who meet the income threshold to qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but are currently excluded based on immigration status.

The excluded communities include:

- Lawful Permanent Residents under the 5-year bar
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) participants and people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- Compact of Free Association (COFA) community members
- Oregonians who are Undocumented
- Anyone in the process of seeking asylum

Many immigrant Oregonians pay taxes that they never receive benefits from. Immigrants are at a higher risk for hunger and without the social safety net to support them. Funding for this program will be allotted from the Oregon General Fund, and it will pass through the legislature as the state is determining how to appropriate their finances. There will be no increased taxes, and no program will be cut in order to fund this program – funding will come from revenue that already exists.

At PHFO, we've seen first-hand how having enough access to food improves the lives of families' across the state. Kids do better in school, and our families' health and well-being improves. We also know that our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. SNAP has a powerful impact in creating jobs and providing economic support in every corner of Oregon. Each dollar spent by a family on SNAP leads to \$1.50 increase in economic activity². This happens because each dollar spent supports grocery stores, farmers and food producers, and workers throughout the supply chain.

I also want to share why this bill is personally important to me.

My family immigrated to the United States from Paraguay when I was just 4 years old. My single mom worked multiple jobs to make ends meet and to give us a good life. After 22 years in this Country, with our citizenship secured, she is still afraid to access any government benefits for fear of losing our citizenship. Over the past few months my mother has repeatedly been sent to the emergency room due to excruciating pain in her abdomen. Doctors informed her that she needs gallbladder surgery, and she is terrified to get care. If I did not have an intimate knowledge of how these systems work, and what resources are available to her, I know she would never get the care that she needs and that it could end up killing her.

We need to remove the stigma for immigrants accessing care, and that means treating everyone equally. For these reasons, I strongly urge your support for SB 610.

Sincerely,

Angelita Morillo
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
SNAP Policy Advocate

² https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err265_summary.pdf