

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services  
FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate  
RE: Support SB 1585 to ensure equal access to hot food  
DATE: February 5, 2024

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Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank’s mission is “to eliminate hunger and its root causes... *because no one should be hungry.*” We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today, and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

### **Oregon Food Bank’s Network is seeing record numbers of food assistance site visits.**

Driven by the ongoing economic fallout of COVID-19, sunseting of pandemic safety nets and the rising cost of food and housing, we are in an ongoing hunger crisis. Last year, we saw **1.9 million visits to food assistance sites** through the Oregon Food Bank Network – a **14% increase** from the previous year. Right now, we are seeing **peak-pandemic levels of demand**. Oregon’s legislature is in a strong position to take action so that Oregonians can be free from hunger and our communities can thrive.

### **Oregon Food Bank Supports Equal Access to Hot Food (SB 1585)**

SB 1585 provides Oregon with a pathway to participate in the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), which is a federal option program that allows Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants who are elderly, have a disability, or are experiencing houselessness to purchase meals at restaurants that choose to opt in to the program. Right now, nine other states are successfully participating in RMP.

The program provides a direct and efficient way to address rising hunger in Oregon, as **17% of Oregon SNAP participants are 60 or older, and 22% live with a disability**. The communities who are eligible for the program often face particular challenges accessing food, even if they’re participating in SNAP. People experiencing houselessness may lack a kitchen to store and prepare food, and seniors and those with disabilities may lack the ability to safely prepare food. The program also provides opportunities for people to access the dignity and experience of being a customer, and to eat a nourishing, warm meal indoors safe from harsh elements.

The program would **boost local economies and support the many Oregon restaurants that are struggling to stay open** right now. Note that restaurants would not be required to participate, as it is a voluntary opt-in program. Finally, we anticipate that after Oregon is able to fully implement the program in 2028, there would be no ongoing costs to the state, as RMP is a federal program.

For these reasons, we urge you to support SB 1585.

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