

TO: Senate Committee on Housing and Development
FROM: Loren Naldoza, Public Policy Advocate
RE: Support of SB 1537
DATE: February 8, 2024



Chair Jama and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of SB 1537, which would make meaningful contributions to the production of additional safe, stable, and affordable homes in Oregon.

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 is unfortunately seeing startling rises in food insecurity and hunger across the state. 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. Oregon's legislature is in a strong position to take action so that Oregonians can be free from hunger and our communities can thrive.

SB 1537 provides much-needed support for the creation of new housing.

Even before the pandemic, we have seen across the state—urban, rural, and frontier communities—that Oregonians continue to suffer from the ever-increasing cost of living, particularly with the cost of housing. Without a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home, we will unfortunately continue to see the pattern of the increasing prevalence of hunger in Oregon. Specifically, Oregon is far behind in producing new housing. Without making meaningful progress in producing over 440,000 units in the next twenty years, this state will unfortunately continue to see more and more Oregonians fall into housing insecurity and—by extension—food insecurity.

The Oregon Food Bank Network will continue to provide vital support for more than a million people facing food insecurity each year. Yet we know we can't end hunger for good through food alone—we have to address the root causes of hunger, one such cause being the rising cost and unavailability of safe, stable, and affordable homes. Oregon Food Bank commends Governor Kotek for her leadership and in addressing Oregon's housing crisis—one of the most critical root causes of hunger in this state—and we urge your support of this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Loren Naldoza

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