

Submitter: Andrea Metheney
On Behalf Of: Delina Biniam Family Forward Oregon
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB611

To: Senate Committee on Human Services
From: Family Forward Oregon
Subject: Yes on SB 611

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Lithicum, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Delina Biniam, Advocacy Manager at Family Forward Oregon. Family Forward is in strong support of Senate Bill 611. Food For All Oregonians which would ensure Youth and Elderly Oregonians, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need to keep them and their families healthy.

Family Forward recognizes that Oregon is grappling with a deepening hunger crisis, where 1 in 6 children lack access to sufficient food, and the number of Oregonians struggling with hunger has increased by one-third since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Oregon's food pantries face unprecedented demand, with the Oregon Food Bank, experiencing its highest level of need in over 40 years. Meanwhile, immigrant Oregonians, who contribute billions to the state's taxes annually, are twice as likely to face hunger and poverty due to exclusion from vital food assistance programs. This not only harms families but also weakens the economy, destabilizes communities, and strains critical systems.

Food is a fundamental human right, essential for our freedom, health, and well-being. Every individual deserves access to nutritious and culturally familiar food without having to sacrifice other basic needs.

Food assistance has far-reaching benefits: improved health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, eviction prevention, job retention, and better behavioral health. When everyone has access to food, our communities thrive - kids excel in school, families' health improves, and local economies grow.

This isn't just about hunger; nutritious food has a ripple effect, benefiting individuals beyond basic needs. Adequate nutrition for children boosts academic performance, reduces dropout rates, and fosters healthy social skills. By ensuring all Oregonians have access to nourishing food, we create a stronger, more prosperous state – from rural towns to urban centers.

SB 611, Food for All Oregonians, will provide low-income youth and elder Oregonians with the grocery benefits they need to thrive, regardless of immigration

status. Modeled after successful programs in Washington and California, this bill builds on community-driven navigator models to ensure trust and safety. By extending SNAP eligibility to include immigrants and refugees, we'll support struggling families, neighbors, friends, students, coworkers, and farmworkers who contribute to Oregon's food system yet can't access it themselves. Food for All aims to end hunger and poverty driven by immigration status, ensuring everyone has the nourishment they need to thrive.

Thousands of Oregonians have spoken out, sending emails and postcards to lawmakers, demanding action on Food for All Oregonians. The time for passage is now during this legislative session.

It's unacceptable that 1 in 6 children in Oregon face hunger today. Lawmakers have the power to change this. By passing SB 611, they can take a crucial step toward ending child hunger in our state.

Family Forward urges you to vote YES on SB 611 and make a difference for Oregon's most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.

Delina Biniam
Advocacy Manager
Family Forward Oregon