

Submitter: Mike Whitaker
On Behalf Of: Hand Up Project-The People's Pantry
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB611

Testimony in Support of the Food for All Oregonians Bill Dear Members of the Oregon Legislature, My name is Michael Whitaker, and I am writing on behalf of the Hand Up Project, an LGBTQ2SIA+ led food assistance program based in Portland. Since 2016, we have been dedicated to bridging the systemic gap in healthy food access, particularly for marginalized communities such as LGBTQ2SIA+ and BIPOC individuals. We strongly support the Food for All Oregonians bill, which aims to ensure that everyone, regardless of their documentation or immigration status, has access to nourishing food. This legislation is crucial for several reasons: 1. Inclusivity and Equity: Thousands of Oregonians are currently excluded from food assistance programs due to their immigration status. This exclusion disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, including youth and elders. By making food assistance available to all, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society. 2. Health and Well-being: Access to nutritious food is essential for both physical and mental health. At the Hand Up Project, we recognize food as medicine and understand that good nutrition is vital for overall well-being. This bill will help ensure that all Oregonians, especially those who are most vulnerable, can access the healthy food they need to thrive. 3. Community Support and Outreach: The bill's provisions for community navigation, outreach, and improved language access are critical. Many individuals in our community face barriers to accessing services due to language and cultural differences. By enhancing outreach and providing support in multiple languages, we can ensure that everyone is aware of and can benefit from these vital resources. 4. Dignity and Independence: Ensuring that our elders and youth have access to food assistance allows them to live with dignity and independence. It is our collective responsibility to support the most vulnerable members of our community and provide them with the resources they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. At Hand Up Project, we have seen firsthand the positive impact that access to nutritious food can have on individuals and families. In 2024 alone, we experienced a 30% increase serving over 7,600 shoppers and distributed nearly 180,000 pounds of food. Our "shopping style" pantry model preserves dignity and caters to personal and culturally specific dietary needs, demonstrating the importance of choice and respect in food assistance programs. We urge you to support the Food for All Oregonians bill and help create a thriving community where everyone has the opportunity to access nourishing food. Together, we can protect our families, preserve our traditions, and ensure a brighter future for all Oregonians. Thank you for your consideration.