



TO: Senate Committee on Human Services
FROM: Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
SUBJECT: Yes on SB 611

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 611, Food for All Oregonians. My name is David Wieland and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO). PHFO is a statewide anti-poverty advocacy organization. Our values and work are centered on creating systemic changes to end hunger. At Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, we do not seek to just feed our neighbors, but end the systemic racism, classism, and other forms of violence that create hunger and inequality. We believe that to end hunger, every Oregonian needs to feel safe and be treated with dignity.

As an organization, our roots go back to the creation of the Oregon Hunger Task Force in 1989. That legislative action clearly affirmed that it is the policy of the state of Oregon that “All persons have the right to be free from hunger.”

It is with this clear understanding that we are members of the steering committee for Food For All Oregonians, legislation that will allow low-income Youth and Elder Oregonians to access the grocery benefits they need to thrive. These are Youth and Elders who are currently excluded from SNAP solely due to immigration status. Food for All will build on successful, community-driven navigator models to ensure trust and community safety.

Oregon cannot end hunger without addressing the disproportionate reality of who experiences hunger right now. As we see looming cuts to our federal safety net, we know that those cuts will disproportionately be felt by immigrant and refugee families in Oregon. But we have the opportunity to address this and soften the blow to our neighbors – Food For All Oregonians.

We know that 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. Immigrant and refugee 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-pandemic — 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 611), 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 and refugees who 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.

Currently, 62,000 Oregonians are excluded from food assistance programs due to immigration status. SB 611 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, people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Oregonians who are undocumented, and anyone in the process of seeking asylum. Many of these Oregonians pay federal, state, and local taxes that they never receive benefits from. Immigrants are at a higher risk for hunger and without the social safety net to support them.

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 improve. 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.

For these reasons, I strongly urge your support for SB 611.

Sincerely,
David Wieland
Policy Advocate
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon