

March 25th, 2025

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Human Services
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Support for SB 611 Food for All Oregonians

Dead Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

My name is Peter Merritt, and I am writing to you today on behalf of Portland-based nonprofit organization Project Access NOW to encourage you to **support SB 611 to fight back against hunger in Oregon and support our most vulnerable community members**. Our mission at Project Access NOW to create equitable access to whole person care and social services is deeply rooted in the ethos that health outcomes improve when people have access to the resources they need to maintain stable social circumstances, like food and shelter. The reality we're facing today in Oregon is that 1 in 6 children don't have enough to eat, and this has disastrous impacts on their health. Immigrant and refugee communities face the greatest barriers to food access, despite paying billions in taxes. **All Oregonians deserve access to food and immigration status shouldn't exclude anyone from being able to feed themselves or their family.**

As a SNAP Outreach grantee for the Oregon Department of Human Services and an organization that primarily serves immigrant communities, Project Access NOW is acutely aware of the impact of the current restrictive eligibility on families who need food assistance most. Without access to SNAP benefits, these families are forced to make impossible choices between feeding their children, paying rent, or covering other basic necessities.

The model for SB 611 has already proven to be successful in Oregon: The Healthier Oregon bill passed during the 2021 legislative session, which extended eligibility for the Oregon Health Plan to individuals of any immigration status who otherwise meet eligibility requirements (such as income). This program has improved health outcomes drastically in immigrant communities. PANOW provides health insurance enrollment assistance and navigation services and has seen a sharp increase in insurance enrollment and utilization from individuals who were previously ineligible for coverage. Expanding SNAP eligibility will

improve health outcomes and social circumstances in immigrant communities in a similar fashion.

Food assistance through programs like SNAP has been proven to reduce the state's health care costs, improve children's academic performance, reduce chronic school absenteeism, reduce risk of eviction, and more. Let's do the right thing for ALL Oregonians. We urge you to join hundreds of community organizations across Oregon in support of this critical legislation to support Oregon's youth and elders.

Thank you,

Peter Merritt
Public Affairs Manager
Project Access NOW