

TO: Joint Committee on Ways & Means
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Senior Manager of Public Policy
RE: Opposition to Cuts including School Meals and SNAP for Seniors
DATE: February 3, 2026



Co-Chairs Sanchez, Lieber, and Members of the Committee:

Oregon Food Bank's mission is "to eliminate hunger and its root causes... *because no one should be hungry.*" Sadly, hunger in Oregon is on the rise. Visits to food pantries across the state are up by 50% since 2023. Cuts to SNAP in H.R. 1 will worsen this crisis.

While choices made at the federal level take away support for our communities, we call on Oregon's legislature to lead our state in a different direction by rejecting harmful cuts, investing in our communities, and preventing our hunger crisis from getting worse. One way Oregon can choose a different path is to reject harmful proposals named in the budget reduction exercises. We would like to highlight two of these proposals that would worsen hunger in Oregon, though this is by no means an exhaustive list...

A \$27 million cut to School Meals would harm students, families, and schools

We oppose taking away \$27m from the state's Hunger-Free Schools Account in the strongest possible terms. Because of the Hunger-Free Schools Account - created by the Student Success Act of 2019 - over 95% of schools offer free breakfast and lunch to all students, no questions asked. This reduces child hunger, increases academic and health outcomes, reduces suspensions, decreases red tape for schools, and helps families afford groceries by providing a benefit up to \$1,400 per year per student. Now is not the time to walk away from that commitment.

While we understand the state may be forced to make hard budget choices in 2026, this would be the wrong approach at the worst possible time. More than 342,500 Oregonians are expected to lose \$475 million per biennium in food assistance through SNAP due to H.R. 1. It would be unthinkable for Oregon to cut funding for school meals on top of these cuts.

The legislature approved \$127.3m for this biennium for the Hunger-Free Schools Account. The budget reduction proposal would take away \$27.3m. The description of this proposal asserts that this cut would "not adversely impact" Oregon's efforts to provide meals at school. We disagree with this claim. On the contrary, it would have a significant negative impact. There are two main reasons for this:

1. **Updated Data:** More recent data shared by ODE with stakeholders (after the budget exercise was completed) indicates that the Hunger-Free Schools account needs

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\$116.9m to maintain the current policy, as opposed to \$100m listed in the reduction exercise. It's also important to note that this amount would only cover reimbursements for up to 90% of meals for qualifying schools. Thus, making a \$27.3m cut to school meals would leave \$16.9m short just to fund the *current* policy, which we will say again, *already underfunds* districts for serving breakfast and lunch to students.

2. **Reimbursing only 90% of meals causes tradeoffs like lower meal quality.** State funding in the Student Success Act for the first few years reimbursed 90% of meals, but in SY '24-'25 ODE was able to reimburse 100% of meals (payments to districts were made on a quarterly basis). This resulted in schools across Oregon being able to improve meal quality, as well as to avoid dipping into districts' general funds when needed. If legislators decided to take away \$10.4m (as opposed to \$27.3m), such improvements will not be possible. Our north star should be fully funding school meals, because Oregon's kids deserve it.

A better way: Pass SB 1581, the School Meals for All bill. We have a unique opportunity to choose a path that makes high-quality school meals accessible to all students in Oregon. We urge rejecting these cuts that would take us backward. Instead, we urge that Oregon move forward by passing School Meals for All (SB 1581) in the 2026 Legislative Session. Oregon can become the 10th state in the nation to adopt such a policy.

We must not make it harder for seniors to apply for SNAP

Seniors who need help are not getting it. Older adults who are eligible for SNAP consistently have the lowest SNAP enrollment rates because they often face increased administrative challenges. The [Elderly Simplified Application Project \(ESAP\)](#), a federal project available to states to make SNAP more accessible for eligible older (age 60+) adults, has demonstrated success across the nation. State agencies [report](#) that ESAP has increased participant satisfaction (82% of states), reduced staff burden (77%), and streamlined administration (73%).

The reduction exercise proposes eliminating Oregon's plan to make ESAP a reality for Oregon's seniors. 25 states currently implement ESAP, Oregon can be the 26th. We urge the legislature to stand up for seniors who struggle to afford food by rejecting this proposed cut.

We urge you to use all available tools to avoid cuts that would harm our communities

We believe that hunger is a policy choice. While Oregon cannot undo the damage created at the federal level due to H.R. 1, we have the choice to avoid replicating these mistakes here in Oregon. It would shock the conscience to close Oregon's budget gap by making cuts to things like school meals, SNAP, and health care before asking those who are doing well to pay their fair share. To this end, Oregon Food Bank supports strategically disconnecting from federal tax provisions so that we can avoid repeating the many harms of H.R. 1 in our state.

