To: House Committee on Housing and Human Services
From: Matt Newell-Ching, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
RE: Statement of Support for Improvements to WIC – HB 2639 and HB 2626
Date: January 30, 2019

****

My name is Matt Newell-Ching, and I am the Public Affairs Director of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. We envision an Oregon where everyone is healthy and thriving, with access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

Every community in Oregon is better off when kids get a healthy foundation for life.

Since 1974, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (AKA "WIC") has helped build that foundation - improving the lives of pregnant women, families, infants, and young kids.

Oregon WIC provides nutrition services and parental support for over 99,000 kids and 39,000 moms. WIC serves pregnant moms and households with kids under the age of 5 at or below 185% of the federal poverty line (or $38,443 annual income for a family of three).

Research consistently shows positive health outcomes, including better maternal health, longer pregnancies, fewer premature births, fewer infant deaths, improved cognitive development, and more consistent health care and up-to-date immunizations.

WIC addresses disparities:
  • Due to historical injustices, food insecurity rates are higher among African-American (29%), Latinx (31%), Native American (32%) communities, and households led by single moms (44%). WIC plays a role in addressing these disparities.
  • Higher participation in rural areas: Over half (53%) of women living outside of metro/urban areas used WIC during their pregnancy, higher than in urban areas (32%).

Despite WIC's success, there are important nutrition gaps created by federal rules. We can't count on Congress to fix these gaps. Oregon can and should close these gaps now!

Hunger-Free Oregon supports two bills to address long-standing gaps in WIC:

    • **HB 2639 - WIC-to-Kindergarten**
    • **HB 2626 - Extending nutrition benefits for moms 2 years postpartum**

WIC-to-Kindergarten ([HB 2639](#))
Oregon has a historic opportunity in 2019 to invest in student success. These investments will work even better when kids start kindergarten well-nourished and ready to learn.

Despite WIC's success, over 10,000 kids in Oregon are cut off from nutrition assistance through WIC when a child turns 5. But many kids don't start kindergarten until they're closer to 6. This gap increases food insecurity for kids and hurts kindergarten readiness.

HB 2639 would close this gap for over 10,000 kids in Oregon by extending WIC nutrition benefits from a child's 5th birthday through the start of kindergarten. Since income eligibility for WIC and school meals are the same, this would ensure that kids at highest risk of food insecurity have access to a continuum of healthy food options as they grow.

Extending nutrition benefits for moms through 2 years postpartum ([HB 2626](#))*
WIC currently supports moms with nutrition assistance through pregnancy and through the first months of a baby's life.

WIC was established in 1974, yet new research highlights the particular importance of supporting families and reducing household toxic stress through a child's second birthday.

But nutrition support for moms is cut off for over 17,000 moms annually in Oregon at either 6 months or a year after a baby is born. Losing this support causes stress on the household precisely at the time when families need the most support.

HB 2626 would extend nutrition support for over 17,000 moms through a child's second birthday. This change would align WIC's nutrition support for moms with the current scientific consensus that supporting families through "the first thousand days" is crucial to creating conditions where families and kids can thrive.

Note - the current language of HB 2626 says it extends nutrition benefits to kids through their second birthday. We are working on an amendment to clarify that this is designed to extend nutrition benefits for **moms. As of the submission of this testimony we have not seen this language but we would like to state for the record that this is our intent.*