

To: House Committee on Human Services
From: Annie Kirschner, Oregon Hunger Task Force
RE: Testimony on HB 2833 and HB 2834
Date: March 3, 2021

Chair Williams and Members of the Committee,

An estimated 1 million people are facing hunger in Oregon- a doubling from the pandemic. The pandemic has laid bare the disparity that has always been true in our state- along racial, gender and economic lines- and has only deepened the struggles people face to afford the essentials like groceries.

Just as requests for food assistance have skyrocketed during the pandemic, the requests for research, coordination, outreach and policy solutions has increased as well. Emergency responses have helped, but more bold and swift public policies to address hunger will be required in 2021 and the coming years.

To build food security, we need to construct a more just and resilient anti-hunger system.

The Oregon Hunger Task Force was created by the Legislature as a cross-sector group to help research hunger and set a clear roadmap for government action and investment. The advisory body has supported significant policy achievements and system-wide coordination since its founding. From establishing a state EITC in the 90's, connecting Oregonians to SNAP during the recession, re-investing in TANF in 2015, crafting the nation's leading school meal policy in 2019, and current work on increasing access to basic needs for people attending college- Oregon has consistently lead the way. The Oregon Hunger Task Force has proven to be a wise investment over time for the state.

Member organizations and agencies are collectively serving hundreds of thousands of Oregonians, and this work has been absolutely essential over the past year.

However, the infrastructure that delivers information, funding, benefits, and food assistance across our state is stretched thin. The reality is that people are being left out. More is needed to fully meet the need, to truly recover, and to prevent the predictable pain of the next natural disaster or economic state of emergency.

Just before the pandemic, the Task Force issued a comprehensive plan to address hunger in the state. It's goals are even more urgent now:

1. Oregonians have equitable access to the resources and opportunities we need to afford life's essentials
2. Nutritious food is accessible to everyone and nutrition support programs are adequate, effective and equitable when we need them
3. People most impacted by hunger are leaders in designing and enacting solutions

These goals led directly to the changes proposed in House Bill 2833 and HB 2834. Together, the pair of bills **will increase the ability of the Hunger Task Force to provide meaningful and timely research, coordination and recommendations to the state to holistically tackle hunger.** These bills will update a more inclusive structure so that membership better reflects people with lived experiences of hunger and

communities most impacted, and will increase funds to reflect the actual cost of delivering the equitable outcomes the state needs right now.

I want to provide the committee information about the need for the changes contained in these bills.

HB 2834 addresses membership.

This bill will modify membership guidelines of the Task Force so that for the first time it will be made up of **one third individuals who have personal experience of food insecurity and are representative of communities most impacted.** This is a high priority and we feel it's important to have it explicitly in statute to reflect our values.

In addition, **one third of members will be representatives of key stakeholder groups**, with slight changes to the current statute to move away from naming specific organizations and instead listing priority areas of expertise. While the bill keeps the current general priorities areas, such as direct service providers, food systems and the migrant community, advocates, education and the religious community, it adds the needed inclusion of culturally specific organizations and emergency disaster response.

In addition to the 4 current bi-partisan and bi-cameral legislator slots, the bill will add "One member of the Legislative Assembly who is serving on a committee related to human services" since so many of the public policies related to hunger fall in this area.

The Task Force did not request any changes to the current membership of state agencies (Departments of Human Services, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, and Housing and Community Services). However it appears that the bill text would inadvertently remove Housing and Community Services and we would request their membership continue.

HB 2833 addresses funding

Rebuilding Oregon's food security will take more investment. HB 2833 will allocate an additional \$150,000 in the coming biennium, to increase the capacity and the impact of the activities of the Hunger Task Force to support the state's policy on hunger.

The budget of the Task Force has been fixed at \$75k a year, with the value of those dollars steadily eroding over the years. State funding now covers less than 1 full staff position, let alone the project costs to **make participation on an advisory body truly accessible for those facing hunger and poverty, let alone respond to the scope of the pandemic and current economic crisis.**

The requested increase would boost capacity to 1.5 fte and allow the Task Force to fully staff it's equitable community engagement efforts, such as recruiting and supporting the participation of community members facing hunger. Funding would add public accessibility to our monthly meetings, Listening Sessions and participatory research through per-diems for community members, travel reimbursement or video conferencing support for members living across the state, ADA accommodations and translation services.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 2833 and HB 2834. We invite you to look to the Task Force as a resource, both to learn more about the status of hunger and to help analyze the impact of policy proposals on those experiencing poverty. I've submitted the Hunger Task Forces state plan, it's current policy recommendations, and information on the current high rates of hunger in our state.

HB 2833 & HB 2834

STRENGTHEN THE OREGON HUNGER TASK FORCE

All people have the right to be free from hunger. People most impacted should be leaders in designing and enacting solutions.

Our state is facing a widespread hunger crisis

1 in 4 Oregonians are facing hunger- a doubling from the pandemic. That's 1 million people.

The pandemic has laid bare the disparity that has always been true in our state- along racial, gender and economic lines- and has only deepened the struggles people face to afford the essentials like groceries.

Emergency responses have helped, but more bold and swift public policies are required in 2021 and the coming years.

To build food security, we need to construct a more just and resilient anti-hunger system

The Oregon Hunger Task Force was created by the State Legislature in 1989. Since that time, the cross-sector group has set a clear road map for government action and investments and has supported significant policy achievements and system-wide coordination. Member organizations and agencies are collectively serving hundreds of thousands of Oregonians.

However, the infrastructure that delivers information, funding, benefits, and food assistance across our state is stretched thin. People are being left out. More is needed to fully meet the need, truly recover, and prevent the predictable and unjust pain of the next natural disaster or economic state of emergency.

HB 2833 and HB 2834 increase the ability of the Hunger Task Force to provide meaningful and timely research, coordination and recommendations to the state to holistically tackle hunger. These bills update statute so that membership better reflects people with lived experiences of hunger, communities most impacted, and increases funds to reflect the actual cost of delivering the equitable outcomes the state needs right now.

OREGON HUNGER TASK FORCE

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HB 2834 - Representative and Inclusive Membership

We, as a state, understand that racism, sexism, transphobia and other forms of oppression are root causes of disparities in hunger. **People who have experienced poverty and hunger at these intersections are experts in addressing food insecurity.** The Hunger Task Force, with an updated membership structure, will have more "ears on the ground" to inform more equitable state policy and programs.

HB 2834 would modify membership guidelines so that for the first time the Task Force will be made up of **one third individuals representative of communities most impacted by food insecurity**, along with one third representatives of updated key stakeholder groups, and one third legislators & state agencies.

HB 2833 - Adequate Funding

Rebuilding Oregon's food security takes investment. HB 2833 allocates an additional \$150,000 in the coming biennium, to increase the capacity and equitable impact of the activities of the Hunger Task Force to support the state's policy on hunger.

The budget of the Task Force has been fixed at \$75k a year, with the value of those dollars steadily eroding over the years. State funding now covers less than 1 full staff position, let alone project **costs to make participation on an advisory body truly accessible for those facing hunger and poverty, and to respond to the scope of the pandemic.**

Support HB 2833 and HB 2834

Support HB 2833 & HB 2834 - Ensure more equitable statewide community engagement and policy development and support the participation of Hunger Task Force members with lived experience of hunger from impacted communities on the front lines of hunger state-wide.

For more information about the Oregon Hunger Task Force, the status of hunger and recommended solutions, visit www.OregonHungerTaskForce.org

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Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Summary

Our state is facing a deep and widespread hunger crisis. **1 in 4 Oregonians are facing hunger- a doubling from the pandemic. That's 1 million people.** Emergency responses have helped, but more bold and swift public policies will be required in 2021 and the coming years.

The pandemic has laid bare the disparity that has always been true in our state, and has only deepened the struggle to make ends meet, afford groceries and rent, and stay healthy.

We're all aware that both the pandemic's health and economic devastation has been felt the deepest by those of us who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or a person of color; women and people in the LGBTQ+ community; immigrants; and those living on a low income or who've been laid off. Our elders, parents of young children and college students- at stages of life with high chances of hunger- have been rocked by the closure of schools, daycares and public services.

We acknowledge with gratitude all the private and public efforts to try and keep us healthy, strong and well fed.

Though the waves of disaster response have helped, the infrastructure that delivers information, funding, benefits, and food assistance across our state is stretched way too thin. People are still being left out. Nothing has yet been erected to help us truly recover, or to prevent the predictable and unjust pain of the next state of emergency.

To build food security, we need to construct a more just and resilient anti-hunger system.

The Oregon Hunger Task Force has developed the following goals with policy recommendations for Oregon's leaders that - if enacted - will address disparities and bring us closer to our vision of an Oregon that is hunger-free and thriving.

Grounding Goals

- Oregonians have equitable access to the resources and opportunity we need to afford life's essentials.
- Nutritious food is easily accessible to everyone and nutrition support programs are adequate, effective and equitable when we need them.
- People most impacted by hunger are leaders in designing and enacting solutions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS HUNGER IN OREGON

STATE GOAL: PEOPLE MOST IMPACTED BY HUNGER ARE LEADERS IN DESIGNING AND ENACTING SOLUTIONS

Those of us who have personally experienced poverty and faced hunger are in the best position to develop solutions. From identifying causes, pointing out hurdles to program access and designing improvements, people with lived experience are vital leaders in ending hunger in our state. Lawmakers, state agencies, social services and advocates can do more to ensure there are opportunities for constituents to share their insight and lead decision making.

Key Policy Priority

- **Oregon Hunger Task Force** - *Update statute so that membership better reflects people with lived experiences of hunger and communities most impacted. Request increased funds to support these members and community engagement. HB 2833 & HB 2834*

STATE GOAL: NUTRITIOUS FOOD IS EASILY ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE AND NUTRITION SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE ADEQUATE, EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE WHEN WE NEED THEM

Addressing hunger means ensuring all Oregonians can access food assistance when we need it. Yet too many of us are being left out. Strong nutrition support programs that address both short term and prolonged conditions of hunger, and fully maximizing federal, state and local resources, can ensure no one goes a day without food.

Policy Priorities for Food Security

- **Hunger-Free Campuses** - *Add a Navigator position to colleges and universities, to connect students to support for basic needs. Create consortium of schools, and require student representation in campus efforts. HB 2835*
- **Hunger-Free Schools** - *Amend the Student Success Act school meal provisions so the expanded income eligibility guidelines are mandated for all applicable schools (currently opt-in). HB 2536*
- **Direct Food Assistance** - *Leverage state funds to increase direct access to food, particularly culturally specific food and assistance for those most impacted by the pandemic.*
 - ▶ *Strengthen access to nutritious foods by expanding “Double-Up Food Bucks” SNAP match to more farmers markets and grocers. SB 555/HB 2292*
 - ▶ *Maintain funding for Farm to School, Oregon Hunger Response Fund, WIC & Senior Farm Direct*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS HUNGER IN OREGON

STATE GOAL: OREGONIANS HAVE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES WE NEED TO AFFORD LIFE'S ESSENTIALS

Economic security is the most effective permanent solution to food insecurity. The state will be in the best position to achieve its goals, and individuals are most likely to succeed, when the issues of poverty and hunger are tackled holistically with housing, healthcare, employment, racial justice and education.

Some communities have been historically excluded from opportunities to build prosperity by a legacy of discrimination. Both economic opportunities and social structures need to be improved to counter the resulting income inequality in our state. When the state and all individuals are financially stable, we can rebound more quickly when faced with an economic crisis like the one we're in now.

Policy Priorities for Economic Security

- **Continue Pandemic Economic Relief**
- **Strengthen Critical Access to Childcare & Housing**
- **Provide Support for Those Displaced Wildfires**
- **Create Equitable access to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**
- **Re-imagine Racial Justice in Public Safety**
- **Protect Workers and Low-income Consumers from Discrimination**
- **Protect State Revenue Stability & Prevent Cuts to Human Services**

FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS HUNGER

Though the Oregon Hunger Task Force mainly focuses on the state level, the role of federal policy change has a tremendous impact on hunger. Actions taken by Congress and the USDA in 2020 have been utterly crucial during the pandemic. Yet there are inequities embedded in federal anti-hunger programs and the pandemic response has fallen far short of what is needed to shore up the financial and food security of Oregonians, and build the future we have always needed.

Federal Policy Priorities

- Repeal policies that increased hunger and decreased access to food.
- Enact stronger, sustained, more equitable COVID response.
- Build the future we need NOW.
 - ▶ **Universal access** to basic needs like healthcare.
 - ▶ **Income Inequality**- create more equitable redistribution of resources through tools like basic income, unemployment insurance, minimum wage, and tax credits.
 - ▶ **Expand eligibility**- Ensure SNAP is available to all people who are food insecure by repealing discriminatory exclusions based on immigration, Tribal, work and student status.
 - ▶ Enact Universal school meals and ongoing EBT grocery benefits for students on non-school days.
 - ▶ **Boost Benefit** levels to cover the true cost of food

ABOUT THE OREGON HUNGER TASK FORCE

The Oregon Hunger Task Force was created by the State Legislature in 1989 to act as a resource within government and as a statewide advocate for Oregonians who are at risk of hunger. When the Task Force was created, the Oregon Legislature declared that “All people have the right to be free from hunger.”

This cross-sector group has worked over the past 30 years to hold the state accountable to this bold statement, setting a clear road map for the changes and investments that need to be made to make progress. The Task Force works collaboratively among its 28 members and with stakeholders throughout Oregon to compile research on the status of hunger and develop proposals for government action.

Through the linked non-profit, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, a staff of eleven works statewide to mobilize communities, increase equitable access to nutrition assistance, and advocate for systemic changes to prevent hunger.

For more information about the status of hunger and recommended solutions, visit www.oregonhungertaskforce.org.

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Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon



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PLAN TO END HUNGER 2019-2022



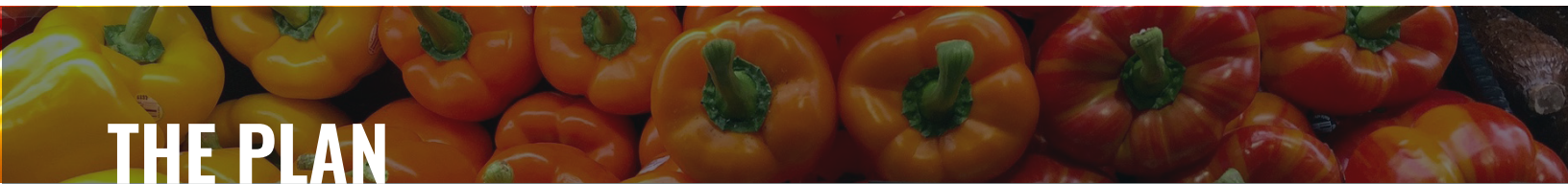


VISION

We envision an Oregon where everyone is healthy and thriving, with access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

While Oregon has several times been ranked as the state with the highest rate of hunger, we are also known for leading with innovative ideas, bipartisan commitment to the issue, and a willingness to tackle the deep, thorny root causes of hunger while mobilizing to meet the immediate need.

Oregon shouldn't settle for anything less than achieving the lowest rate of hunger in the US.



THE PLAN

The Oregon Hunger Task Force was created by the State Legislature in 1989 to act as a resource within government and as a statewide advocate for Oregonians who are at risk of hunger. When the Task Force was created, the Oregon Legislature declared that “All persons have the right to be free from hunger.”

This cross-sector group has worked over the past 30 years to hold the state accountable to this bold statement, setting a clear roadmap for the changes and investments that need to be made to make progress. The Task Force works collaboratively among its 28 members and with stakeholders throughout Oregon to compile research on the status of hunger and develop proposals for government action. Through the linked non-profit, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, a staff of eleven works statewide to promote community awareness, connect people to nutrition programs, and advocate for systemic changes to prevent hunger.

The Oregon Hunger Task Force has developed the following plan with recommendations to Oregon's leaders that - if enacted - will bring us closer to our vision of an Oregon that is hunger-free and thriving.

In this plan we have set three goals for the state:

- 1. Oregonians have equitable access to the resources and opportunity we need to afford life's essentials.**
- 2. Nutritious food is accessible to everyone and nutrition support programs are adequate, effective and equitable when we need them.**
- 3. People most impacted by hunger are leaders in designing and enacting solutions.**

For each goal we offer public policy solutions, long term recommendations, and ways to measure progress.

THE NEED

Hunger is decreasing in Oregon. Yet it is still persistently and unacceptably high. We are worse-off than the national average and have the highest hunger rate in the northwest.

One in five kids in Oregon lives in a household that struggles to afford food, as do one in six seniors. Despite low unemployment, Oregon's food insecurity rate has yet to return to pre-recession levels. Disparities remain: renters are seven times more likely to experience hunger. People in rural areas, and households led by people of color, Black and African-Americans, Native Americans, and Latinx people, and single mothers experience hunger at disproportionately high rates.

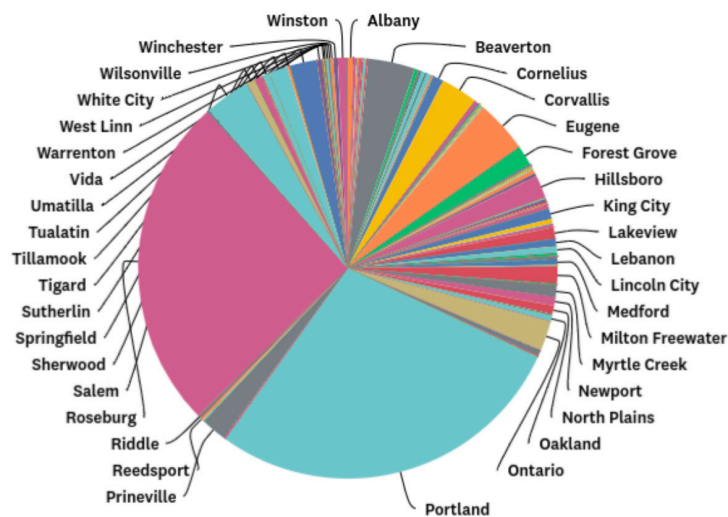
A full-time job is often not enough to get out of poverty. Too many Oregonians are forced to make impossible choices between basics like rent, child care, and food. Even at near "full-employment" in our state, the high costs of living means workers with low wages and people on fixed incomes have difficulty making ends meet.

SOLUTIONS

The Oregon Hunger Task Force has developed a series of comprehensive multi-year plans since 2005 to address hunger. The recommendations are long-term and address the root causes of the issue, while also pointing to concrete policy changes. Every few years the strategies are updated to reflect the changing realities people face--the economy, shifts in policies, new research.

Our first step in updating this plan was to ask Oregonians what they thought. We posed the question, "Out of all of the people in Oregon, 560,000 of us don't always have the food we need. **Thinking about your own community, what are 3 things that would make it easier for more neighbors to make ends meet?**"

We heard back from over 900 people, from 39 towns and cities in every corner of the state. The majority of people who shared their ideas--67% - had faced hunger themselves in the past twelve months. We heard from a large number of seniors, as well as families raising young children.



Survey Response Location

Demographically, respondents roughly resemble Oregon's population: 77% of respondents identified as white, 9% as Latinx, 7% Native American, 2.5% Black or African American, 2.5% Asian and 2% as Pacific Islander. People of color, however, disproportionately experience hunger at rates two to three times that of white Oregonians, and more work needs to be done to highlight specific solutions from communities who feel the burden of hunger most acutely.

“Greater job availability and pay anywhere nearby...it has been unreasonably difficult to get a decent job and continue to support a family in ‘Hometown’, Oregon.”

Survey Respondent

The issues raised make it plain that the affordability of food is linked to the availability of work that pays well, a home that doesn't break your budget, childcare you trust, transportation within your community, education you can afford and that connects you to a career, accommodations for your disability, choices in where you buy groceries, and food assistance options that meet your needs. We also heard clearly and repeatedly that people who are facing hunger crave respect, dignity and to be heard with understanding and empathy.

The responses made it clear that to care deeply about hunger requires us also to care deeply about poverty, identity, agriculture, education, immigration, economics, race, geography, family, public health, justice and community.

“Better pay for jobs (equal pay would be nice) and benefits for those needing to cobble together multiple jobs. Fixing the broken and racist systems that keep Black and Brown folks in poverty.”

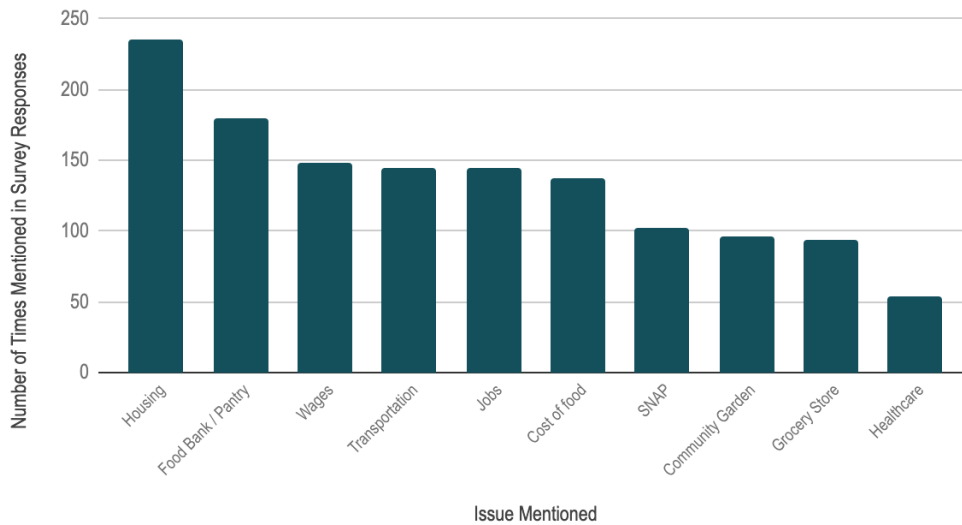
Survey Respondent

We also traveled to several communities to hear from local partners working to address hunger and asked **“What do you want the state to know about hunger in your community? What do you want lawmakers to do?”**

The responses mapped to the wide variety of situations people face that lead to hunger, and also surfaced many common ideas for solutions. They teased out the levels of change needed, from the individual, to the local community, to state and federal policy changes.

***“Access to education.
Accessibility to stores/transportation.
More/enough stores in all neighborhoods.
More food stamps or something similar but different, better eligibility requirements.
Remove the stigma around being poor”***

Survey Respondent



Top Issues Mentioned by Survey Respondents

WHY IT MATTERS FOR OREGON

We're all at our best when we have enough to eat, but there are times in many people's lives when it's hard to afford healthy food and to make ends meet.

Nutritious food helps babies hit milestones, fuels kids as they learn and grow, reduces the chances of chronic disease in adults and makes it more likely seniors are healthy and independent.

Our state has set ambitious goals to respond to the most pressing issues facing Oregonians. The affordability of housing. Achieving success in education. Access to healthcare. Economic vitality and a strong workforce. Closing disparities so that everyone in our state has equitable opportunities and outcomes regardless of race or gender, disability or zip code.

Each of these priorities are interconnected with hunger. **The state will be in the best position to achieve its goals, and individuals are most likely to succeed, when the issues of poverty and hunger are tackled holistically and are included in discussions about housing, healthcare, employment and education.**

“Most people are one paycheck away from homelessness if something major happens. I’m homeless! Things need to change!! We aren’t free when it comes to making a living!”

Survey Respondent

GOALS, RECOMMENDATIONS & MEASUREMENTS

GOAL 1: Oregonians have equitable access to the resources and opportunities we need to afford life's essentials.

Rationale

Economic stability is the most effective permanent solution to food insecurity. Hunger is a symptom of poverty. If all working families and individuals earned enough to meet basic expenses, the need for food assistance and other social services would be dramatically reduced. For those with barriers to work or not of employment age, effective supports should ensure their wellbeing. Oregonians also need savings to carry them through difficult times.

“Drivers Licenses for everyone regardless of legal status.”

Survey Respondent

Economic security, measured both by income and assets, must be more equitably experienced across Oregon's population. Some communities have been historically excluded from opportunities to build prosperity by a legacy of discrimination. Both economic opportunities and social structures need to be improved to counter the resulting income inequality in our state.

When the state, families and individuals are financially stable, we can rebound more quickly when faced with an economic crisis.

Public Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Economic Stability for Families and Communities

- Renew and Raise Oregon's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
- Enact a Paid Family Leave Insurance Program
- Boldly address Oregon's affordable housing crisis
- Boost access to Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC)
- Strengthen services for families with highest barriers in the TANF program
- Address gaps in services related to Federal rule and policy changes

“Easier access to housing services, if you don't have a safe home, it's near impossible to do the work necessary to survive.”

Survey Respondent

Long term recommendations

1. Support accessibility of **living wage jobs for all Oregonians** through effective pathways for work readiness like higher education and vocational training, and practical supports for workers.
2. Ensure reforms to Oregon's tax and revenue policy that result in **a system that is stable, non-regressive, and sustainable.**

“Universal Health Care - Truly affordable health care would help people make “ends meet”, since so many of us are under water paying medical bills.”

Survey Respondent

“Jobs that pay a little more than just enough to barely make bills. Then we would be able to provide better for our family.”

Survey Respondent

3. Strengthen policies and programs that **help families afford basics** like housing, child care and transportation.
4. Ensure state policies and practices **address disparities caused by discrimination** in settings like education, healthcare, housing, employment and wages, and criminal justice.
5. Support a **healthcare system that provides excellent, affordable care to all Oregonians** and creates connections between health and access to nutrition.

Long term measures

- Food insecurity is reduced
- Poverty rates are reduced
- Close disparities in poverty and hunger by race, gender and geography
- Increase in state investments in anti-poverty programs and increase the percent of people in poverty benefitting from them
- Increase number of healthcare providers utilizing food security screenings and providing patients with interventions such as outreach materials or on-site food distribution

GOAL 2: Nutritious food is accessible to everyone and nutrition support programs are adequate, effective and equitable when we need them.

Rationale

Everyone deserves to be free from hunger. People in every community in Oregon need affordable places to buy or grow nutritious food and our food system is healthiest when it's accessible to everyone.

“Being able to do the food pantry at least 2x a month (single moms); open more days a week or twice a day; single moms get more food and kid section with more kid foods.”

Survey Respondent

Those of us who fall on hard times face the challenge of making ends meet until our circumstances turn around. Food budgets are usually the first thing we cut. Some Oregonians, such as single parents, seniors on a fixed income and people living with a disability may face this challenge each month. For others, like immigrants and people with barriers to work, access to food assistance is being curtailed by federal policies.

Addressing hunger means ensuring all Oregonians can access food assistance when we need it. Yet too many of us are being left out. Strong nutrition support programs that address both short term and prolonged conditions of hunger, and fully maximizing state and local resources, can ensure no one goes a day without food.

“Stigma free access to nutritious food, many choices of economical food to fit preferences, allergies and cultural differences”

Survey Respondent

Public Policy Recommendations to Address Hunger in Oregon

- Create Hunger-Free Schools by expanding Universal Meals and Breakfast after the Bell
- Extend nutrition assistance to five-year olds for kindergarten readiness (WIC-to-6)
- Continue investing in the Oregon Hunger Response Fund
- Continue investing in the Farm Direct Nutrition Program for seniors and families with kids
- Renew the Crop Donation Tax Credit
- Increase access to nutrition programs for college students
- Support “SNAP Match” at Farmers’ Markets through Double-Up Food Bucks

Long term recommendations

1. Advance a federal policy agenda to **adjust the income eligibility for nutrition assistance**, so a higher percentage of people benefit, or establish policies for state-level programs to fill the gap. Oppose federal policies that are creating barriers to access for immigrant communities.
2. Use state resources to broaden the eligibility guidelines and **improve the benefit level of SNAP for persistently underserved groups** such as college students, immigrants and people with barriers to work.
3. Address childhood hunger by increasing the capacity of child nutrition programs to **ensure year-round access to nutritious food at no charge** and increase participation in WIC.
4. **Overcome barriers for seniors and people with disabilities** by increasing the capacity of congregate feeding sites, home delivered grocery and meal services, and mobile pantries.
5. Support the Oregon Food Bank Statewide Network and partner agencies in **building resilient, client-focused, healthy programs**.
6. **Expand geographic access to affordable and nutritious food**. Ensure investment in public transportation is targeted within communities with high food insecurity, particularly those with limited locations of grocery stores, farmers markets, community gardens and food pantries.
7. **Build the health of the food system** through public policies targeted to benefit those at risk of hunger, for example incentivising farmers to donate crops to food banks, supporting farm to school, and boosting people's purchasing power to buy local produce through SNAP Match and WIC Farm Direct programs.

“DHS could up the allotment on the SNAP program. Give them more food - food is expensive.”

Survey Respondent

Long term measures

- Get to 0% Very Low Food Insecurity (also known as Hunger)
- Ensure all those who are food insecure are eligible for public nutrition assistance
- Close gaps between those who are eligible and the % participating
- Increase food services in underserved communities geographically and demographically

GOAL 3: People most impacted by hunger are leaders in designing and enacting solutions.

Rationale

Those of us who have personally experienced poverty and faced hunger are in the best position to develop solutions. From identifying causes, pointing out hurdles to program access and designing improvements, people with lived experience are vital leaders in ending hunger in our state. There is also a growing understanding of what supports are needed in order for participation on an advisory body, advocating for change or even voting truly accessible for those facing hunger and poverty.

“Ask those most in need. Support them. Give them what they need.”

Survey Respondent

Lawmakers, state agencies, social services and advocates can do more to ensure there are opportunities for constituents to share their insight and lead decision making. The Oregon Hunger Task Force can help share best practices and track the level of community engagement.

Long term recommendations

1. Build accountability mechanisms into anti-poverty and nutrition programs, like client advisory bodies, surveys and participant feedback, to ensure regular review and input by those experiencing hunger and poverty.
2. Increase civic engagement of people in poverty by removing barriers to registering to vote and participating in elections.

Long Term Measures

- Voter registration rates improve for people in poverty
- Every key statewide anti-hunger program, whether run by public entities or non-profits, has an accountability mechanism for people with personal experience of hunger, or utilizing their program, to provide input and program review

“If neighbors who need help know they’re not alone, they’re more likely to reach out. Even when I was hungry and having all sorts of issues I knew about services but was stubborn/shy/worried. I wouldn’t be now after several life lessons...Taking away the shame--telling people we all have problems...makes people more likely to say they need help.”

Survey Respondent



Thank you to the members of the Oregon Hunger Task Force for committing time and and thoughtfulness to developing recommendations and policy solutions to the root causes of hunger.

This project was coordinated by the staff of Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, and a special thanks to the contributions of Chris Baker, Alison Killeen and Etta O'Donnell-King.

Our deep gratitude to the Plan to End Hunger Advisory Group Participants:

Jackie Leung, Micronesian Islander Community

Mis Carlson-Swanson, Oregon Food Bank Tillamook County Services

Marta Hanna, Parent Leader, Ontario, Oregon Child Development Coalition

Susannah Morgan, Oregon Food Bank

Sue Woodbury, Oregon Health Authority, WIC

Dawn Myers, Oregon Dept. Of Human Services

Special thanks to additional community partners who contributed to the recommendations and helped distribute the survey and collect input in their communities, including:

Trevor Whitbread, Centro Latino Americano

Maureen Short, Mike Fieldman, Sarah McGregor, UCAN Community Action Partnership

Casey Wheeler, Columbia Pacific Food Bank

Sharon Thornberry, Columbia Gorge Food Bank

Suzanne Washington, Meals on Wheels People

Our utmost thanks goes out to the hundreds of Oregonians who invested their time, wisdom and heart into sharing what changes need to be made so more people in their community can make ends meet, especially those who have faced hunger in their own lives. We are honored you trusted us with your experiences and truths, and hope this plan helps move our state to take bold actions worthy of your hopes—one that is more just and equitable, and free from hunger.



OREGON HUNGER TASK FORCE

Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon

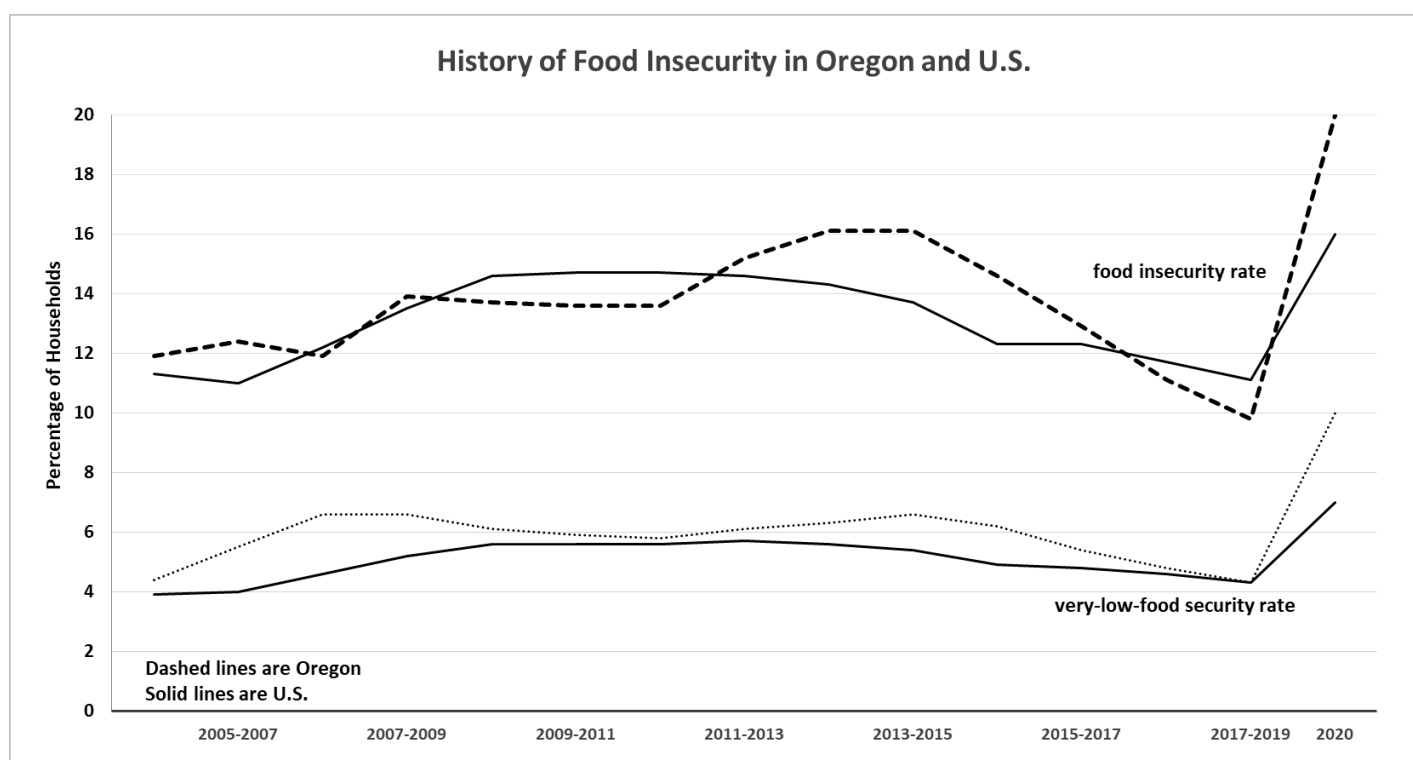
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Oregon's Food Insecurity in the Time of COVID

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Through December 2019, Oregon had been experiencing steadily declining food insecurity^a rates, finally dropping below the US average again after remaining stubbornly high through the recovery from the Great Recession. Indeed, Oregon's steady decline in food insecurity from around 2014 represented the greatest improvement by any one state over that five-year period (USDA 2020). But the COVID economic crisis since Spring 2020 reversed all of that progress and has brought the state to levels of food insecurity not seen before.



To date there is no authoritative, timely, and definitive count of how many households in Oregon have experienced food insecurity since the beginning of the pandemic. In part this is because data about food insecurity are usually collected and made public slowly. However careful efforts to estimate the number suggest that by May of 2020 almost 1 million Oregonians were experiencing food insecurity (OPAL 2020a). That represented a food insecurity rate of around 20%, a figure slightly below the Oregon rate estimated by national experts (Feeding America 2020). [Because "very low food security"^a often is around half of the food insecurity rate, we include here a conservative estimated rate of 10% for these Oregon households experiencing especially difficult circumstances.]

Since our estimate in May, another 286,000 people have applied for unemployment. That sum is around

175,000 more people than would have applied for unemployment pre-COVID (~4,000/week for the past 28 weeks). Households experiencing unemployment, under current pandemic conditions, can reasonably be assumed to have a food insecurity rate of 30% (see OPAL 2020a). This would mean that since May another 62,500 households (~157,000 individuals living in those households) have experienced food insecurity. Because the food insecurity rate measures the number of households who have experienced this difficulty over the course of the year, this count should be added to the 900,000 highlighted in May even if some people who were food insecure then may now have returned to work and to food security. However, this estimate does not take into account the many who were never unemployed, but were under-employed with hours cut due to the recession. Thus, the number of households that have at some time in the past 9 months experienced food insecurity has likely grown by at least 100,000 since we first made our estimates at the beginning of the pandemic-induced recession. The estimate of 1,000,000 computes to a food insecurity rate in the range of around 25% for 2020, approximately the same number estimated by Feeding America (2000) using other assessment techniques. In short, the food insecurity rate in Oregon has more than doubled in a year, with almost at least 1 million, hence one in four, Oregonians experiencing food insecurity this year.

While the experience of food insecurity is found widely throughout Oregon, it is not evenly distributed throughout social groups. For example, the food insecurity rate among Black, Indigenous, and other people of color in Oregon has been two to three times higher than for white Oregonians (e.g., 20-30% v 11% in the past five years). Recent job losses in those occupations where minority workers are employed have certainly led to a disproportionate impact of food insecurity among minority-led households likely increasing the food insecurity rate well above 30% for these groups.

In the Absence of COVID

Prior to the pandemic, the Current Population Survey had collected its usual December food insecurity data in 2019, and then released these to the public in September of 2020. These data show that in the period leading up to the pandemic, Oregon's improvements in food security were widespread, continuing to fall in almost every demographic category. For example, renters continued to show improvement, with food insecurity sliding another 2 percentage points from the previous year. Similarly, single mothers and married couples with children improved by another 2.5 to 3 percentage points, and people with high school diplomas (without higher education) saw a 2.5 percentage point improvement. Rural food insecurity had fallen 3 percentage points as well. (Detailed tables are available at OPAL 2020b). All of these improvements led to the 9.8% food insecurity rate by 2017-2019, the lowest food insecurity rate for Oregon ever measured during the past 25 years that data were collected by the USDA.

It Could Have Been Worse

The improvements in food security prior to COVID may reflect under-appreciated strengths in the food security safety net of Oregon. This preparation for crisis mirrors what happened 12 years ago when Oregon's food security safety net provided by state and private agencies (e.g., Department of Human Services, Oregon Food Bank, etc.) was positioned well to respond to spikes in unemployment during the Great Recession, dampening the rise of food insecurity at that time while other states saw large increases in food insecurity. Subsequently, while some of the dramatic decline in Oregon's food insecurity prior to 2020 was undoubtedly the result of rising minimum wage and declining unemployment throughout much of the state, it was also a

time marked by sustained high rates of participation in federal nutrition programs such as SNAP (“food stamps”) and free/reduced price school meals. That is, efforts by the Department of Human Services, other state agencies, and many non-profit advocacy groups had strengthened the state’s safety net so that they were able to quickly enroll newly eligible families, advocate with the federal government for innovative approaches such as the Pandemic EBT program, and collaborate with school districts to distribute school lunches to children who could not come to school. Meanwhile, the privately organized emergency food system delivered unprecedented volumes of food to pantry visitors. Given how slowly many unemployed residents were able to access unemployment insurance, and given the additional stresses added to that safety net with the fires of late summer 2020, the nimbleness, efficiency, and creativity of the food-safety net is noteworthy.

Endnote:

a) Food insecurity is the combination of worries about and behaviors associated with a household not having sufficient food for everyone in the household. Respondents are asked a battery of questions about their previous year’s experiences feeding themselves and their families. If they provide 3 or more indications of difficulties, they are categorized as food insecure. For households without children, if they provide 8 or more indications, they are further categorized as having very-low-food-security, a concept referred to by many as “hunger”. For households with children, they are asked additional questions and then 10 affirmative answers indicate that those households have very-low-food-security. Thus, those with very-low-food-security are a subset of those with food insecurity. For a further discussion of this measurement, consult the USDA’s Economic Research Service website.

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About the author

Mark Edwards is a Professor of Sociology in Oregon State University’s School of Public Policy. He has been researching hunger and food insecurity in the western U.S. for the past 20 years, and provides research assistance to the Oregon Hunger Task Force, Oregon Food Bank, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, and others focused on addressing food insecurity in the United States.

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