

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health, and Recovery  
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Policy Manager  
RE: Support for HB 717  
DATE: February 2, 2020



Chair Gelser and members of the committee,

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure. **In 2020, 1 in 5 people in our communities faced hunger – a dramatic increase.** And the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic have fallen hardest on people who have faced systemic inequities for generations: communities of color, immigrants and refugees, single parents and caregivers, and our trans and gender non-conforming neighbors.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is our nation’s most effective anti-hunger program. At the height of the pandemic, over 700,000 Oregonians participated in SNAP. This helped families put food on the table and saved countless jobs in the food supply chain - from farmers to grocers - as millions of Americans lost income due to the pandemic.

Despite SNAP’s success, the program has limitations that should be addressed. SNAP can be used only to purchase food. Other essential items, such as soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, pads/tampons, and diapers are excluded. SB 717 would make critical investments to improve SNAP by adding \$10/month for the purchasing of personal hygienic items. Many of the 1,400 food pantries Oregon Food Bank serves across the state stock such items for this very reason.

We also want to draw attention to additional federal limitations on SNAP - the cumulative impact of which perpetuates hunger in our communities. These limitations include:

- College students face additional barriers to accessing SNAP that make it harder for Oregonians to finish degree programs.
- Many immigrant families are excluded from SNAP.
- Oregonians who face barriers finding full-time employment can be subject to time limits depending on where they live.
- Low food benefit levels mean that on average, SNAP lasts a family about 3 weeks out of a month. Many families report purchasing cheaper food, often sacrificing nutrition.

We have the opportunity to rebuild and emerge stronger so that we can end hunger for good in our communities. Adding investments that build on SNAP are long overdue, and we look forward to working with the legislature to advance ideas that address gaps in the needs of our communities. This is our moment to embrace our shared values, care for each other and take bold action in support of *all* Oregonians.

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