



**American
Heart
Association.**

To: Senate Human Services Committee

Date: February 2, 2021

Re: Senate Bill 555/ Senate Bill 440

Good afternoon Chair Gelser and members of the committee. For the record my name is Christina Bodamer, and I am the Oregon Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association, here today in support of SB 555 and SB 440.

What would you do if you were hungry? Many of us are lucky enough to not have to think about where your next meal is coming from, but for the one in four Oregonians that are food insecure this is a daily part of reality. Food insecurity has nearly double in Oregon since the beginning of the pandemic, with certain communities perpetually experiencing the highest levels of hunger.

SNAP, or supplemental nutrition assistance program, is an essential safety-net that provides thousands of Oregonians with food every day and has done so across the nation for over 50 years. However, as the program has no nutrition standards, those who count on the program for food may face health problems due to unhealthy diets. SNAP incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks work to change that dynamic.

Nearly two-thirds of all SNAP participants are children, elderly, and people with disabilities. Double Up Food Bucks helps families stretch their dollars to buy healthier options, which mean that children are shown and taught healthy behaviors, taking the first step toward establishing lifelong habits that will support their overall health and wellness for years beyond their enrollment in SNAP programs.

Data from projects across the nation show that SNAP incentive programs, like Double Up Food Bucks, help to increase the overall Healthy Eating Index – a key measure of Americans diet quality – as well as the fruit and vegetable components of the Healthy Eating Index score. Simply put, when given incentives to buy fruits and vegetables, participants spend more of their benefits on these healthy items, increasing the quality of their diet.

There are health benefits of eating a healthy diet for everyone, but eating more fruits and vegetables can improve overall health for SNAP participants in particular, often reducing the incidence of chronic diseases like heart disease and type II diabetes.

Studies show:

- SNAP recipients who were given incentives to buy more fruits and vegetables ate almost a quarter of a cup more fruits and vegetables per day.
- SNAP recipients who are given incentives to buy more fruits and vegetable not only spend more of their other SNAP benefits on these healthy foods, but also add a greater variety of healthy food to their diets.
- SNAP incentives programs have shown to cut health care costs. In Massachusetts, 73% of Medicaid cost growth fell after SNAP benefits increased – especially for people with chronic illnesses with high sensitivity to food insecurity.

SNAP incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks show that it is possible to adjust the SNAP program to improve nutrition without increasing stigma on the beneficiaries or burden on retailers. Oregon can do more than just provide low-income neighbors with food; we can provide them with healthy food. In a state that is as bountiful as ours with locally grown produce around nearly every corner, more must be done to provide access to healthy fruits and vegetables.

Without continued funding, this incredible program will be forced to drastically limit the number of participating sites in the next biennium. Due to the economic impact of COVID-19, this scale back would come at a time when SNAP, P-EBT, and DUFB are needed most. Oregon would be leaving federal matching dollars on the table, as the USDA GusNIP, authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill, provides a 1:1 match for all non-federal funding. Double Up Food Bucks Oregon has already proven that those matching dollars can be realized, by successfully securing match dollars from the last investment this body bestowed on the program in one-time funding.

I am asking for your help today in creating an Oregon where no one is hungry by supporting Senate Bill 555.