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STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 10



Oregon State Senate

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Chair Gelser
Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health, and Recovery
Oregon State Senate

Good afternoon, Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Anderson and committee members. For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, I'm the State Senator from District 10 in Salem. Thank you for allowing me to speak to SB 717 today.

In the wake of this global pandemic, and the economic challenges it has presented us, we know that many Oregonians are struggling with the cost of living, even to meet basic needs. The combined costs of housing, healthcare, utilities, and groceries are difficult for many families to address even in a good economy, but now more than 400,000 households in Oregon are facing increased challenges to meet their basic needs.

SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a federal program which brings new dollars into Oregon's economy, provides important funds to help assist 713,000 Oregonians purchase needed food basics. I applaud every effort we are making to help people learn about and use this program, which brings in new federal funds to help purchase food from our farmers and our stores here in Oregon, and helps to reduce hunger here in our state.

However, as a clergyperson and healthcare advocate who has been supportive of both these federal benefits and of local food pantries to help families in need, I have observed that food pantries have in short supply needed items which most families also purchase at grocery stores, but which are not covered by SNAP benefits, namely, personal care items. Every family needs these basics: soap, toilet paper, toothbrushes, toothpaste, laundry detergent, dish soap, and feminine hygiene products. These items cannot be purchased using SNAP funds, and I think that we can all agree that during a global pandemic, these things are even more essential for every household.

Indeed, if we were to ask our local business community, we would find indications that the need for help in purchasing these items has grown, a trend which is seen across the county with higher levels of theft of these items. The Washington Post reports that in the wake of COVID-19, people have been shoplifting personal hygiene items at higher levels out of desperation. SB 717 would provide an additional \$10 per month to SNAP recipient households to purchase personal hygiene items. Although \$10 will not cover everything that families need, hopefully it can help supplement a bit for families who are truly struggling.

I do want to share as well that I met with Oregon Department of Human Services to talk about the fiscal on this bill and we are looking at roughly \$50 million per year to provide \$10 per household per month. That would buy a package of toilet paper, toothbrushes, a tube of toothpaste, and a bottle of dish soap with very careful shopping. I understand that in a tough budget year, this is a high price to ask, but these items are in short supply at the Oregon Food Bank and at the very many local food pantries they help to support. However, I think that starting a discussion about this real need, at this time, is important.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.