

TO: Senate Committee on Healthcare
FROM: Leann Knapp, Oregon Food Bank
RE: **Support SB 557 to increase healthcare access and decrease hunger**
DATE: March 8, 2021



Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure. **In 2020, 1 in 4 of our neighbors faced hunger¹** – a dramatic increase driven by the public health and economic fallout of COVID-19. At Oregon Food Bank, we know that **hunger is a symptom of harmful policies and systems that create barriers for people to thrive**, and that we will only emerge stronger when we address hunger together, as a community. We also know that we can only end hunger for good by tackling its root causes, which is why we must act to address the inequality and oppression that create serious disparities in all areas of life, including healthcare access.

At Oregon Food Bank, we often find that **when low-income Oregonians are forced to make choices between what they can and cannot afford, food is one of the places people begin to make sacrifices**. This can look like skipping meals, parents not eating so that children are able to, or just eating less than they normally would are all ways families make food stretch. Similarly, skipping dental care because they don't have coverage and the out-of-pocket costs can be prohibitive is very common, especially for low-income families.

According to the Health Policy Institute of the American Dental Association, in 2013 the average per patient spending on dental care was \$685 per year with no insurance- those numbers are even higher now when adjusted for inflation.² **No one in Oregon should be forced to pay the high cost of dental care and be at risk of needing to skip other necessities like food**, or go without proper dental care- which can have serious effects on their overall health.

Over the last decade, the COFA Alliance National Network (CANN) has worked tirelessly to ensure that COFA Oregonians have access to the healthcare they need. However, Oregon has yet to provide COFA residents with adequate access to dental care. That is why **Oregon Food Bank is proud to support Senate Bill 557**, which would provide Medicaid-level dental care for those who do not qualify for Medicaid but do qualify for the COFA Premium Assistance Program for their medical insurance.

We will not be able to end hunger until everyone in our state has access to affordable healthcare coverage- including dental care. We urge your support for Senate Bill 557 and thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/new-osu-report-shows-about-25-oregonians-experienced-food-insecurity-2020>
² <https://healthcare.oregon.gov/Documents/COFA%20Dental%20Study%20Final%20Report%202020.pdf>

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