



TO: Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Leann Knapp, Oregon Food Bank  
RE: **SB 553 is Critical in Addressing Hunger**  
DATE: February 8, 2021

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## Ending hunger requires access to education. We urge your support for SB 553.

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure. In 2020, **1 in 4 of our neighbors faced hunger**<sup>1</sup> – 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 education.

Due to the cost of attaining a college degree and the financial challenges that often come with being a student, **college students experience hunger at an alarming rate**. In a recent survey of students conducted by Feeding America, with the support of Oregon Food Bank and Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, students were asked what barriers they face that make their educational goals more difficult to achieve. The most pervasive issue reported by students was financial instability due to “the numerous expenses associated with attending college”.<sup>2</sup> **These realities are only exacerbated when students do not have access to the financial aid and other supports they need.**

Senate Bill 553 would ensure about 20 COFA high school graduates per year are able to enroll in an Oregon college or university and pay in-state tuition costs. **Policies that decrease the cost of higher education are also policies that aim to reduce hunger**. Not to mention that opening career pathways for students decreases the likelihood that they will experience hunger later in life.

There is much work to be done to address hunger in our communities. But by providing COFA students- who have been denied the same level of support and access to higher education as their fellow Oregonians- in state tuition, we move one step further in the right direction. That is why the **Oregon Food Bank urges your support for Senate Bill 553.**

We thank you for your consideration and dedication to ending the root causes of hunger in Oregon.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/new-osu-report-shows-about-25-oregonians-experienced-food-insecurity-2020>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/College\\_LISTENING\\_REPORT\\_2020.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/College_LISTENING_REPORT_2020.pdf)