

Community Connection



Of Northeast Oregon, Inc.
Baker, Grant, Union and Wallowa Counties

Community Action Agency
Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC)
Area Agency on Aging (Dist.13)
Housing Counseling Agency
Public Transit Provider
Youth Programs

April 16, 2021

The Honorable Betsy Johnson
The Honorable Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
The Honorable Dan Rayfield
Co-Chairs of the Joint Ways & Means Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs:

REQUEST: ROLL-UP OF ONE TIME FUNDS IN HUNGER PROGRAMS FOR 21-2023

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon is asking the Legislature to roll-up one-time funds for the Oregon Hunger Response Fund for the 21-2023 biennium.

I am the Regional Food Bank Manager for Community Connection of Northeast Oregon. We serve the counties of Union, Baker, Grant, and Wallowa. Our service area spans almost 13,000 square miles. Our organization has made significant progress towards ending hunger in our communities, but we haven't arrived yet. Oregon Hunger Response Fund provides the Oregon Food Bank Network with critical state funding to help each regional food bank leverage more resources, more food and more cost-effective operations across Oregon.

In recent years, our food bank has added additional cooler storage space, increased local grocery rescue donations, started weekly produce routes into Wallowa and Grant Counties, and worked to secure a new warehouse for the food bank. Oregon Hunger Response fund has supported these efforts in one way or another, and we're eager to continue to expand the work of the Regional Food Bank. These investments supported Northeast Oregonians when the pandemic hit. The pandemic initially caused a sharp increase in the number of people coming to our pantries for help. Some pantries saw their food box numbers double overnight. Feeding America estimated that in 2020 food insecurity rates in our service area were anywhere from 15.2% to 18.4%. Thankfully, Oregon Hunger Response Fund had already allowed us to make critical investments in our infrastructure that paid off when our communities needed us the most. Hunger is an entrenched problem in Oregon and the pandemic is bringing this to light. Feeding America estimates that food insecurity rates will continue to be elevated beyond their pre-pandemic levels for the rest of 2021.

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The fact is that our Regional Food Bank has not met the need for every person who needs emergency food in our service area, and we will continue to expand our programs until no one is hungry in our communities. Thank you for your investments in the past; let's also look forward to making Oregon hunger-free.

Please make \$4.56 million the new base budget for the Oregon Hunger Response Fund in the Oregon Department of Human Services budget for the 2021-2023 biennium by rolling up the 2019-2021 one-time funds. Without this fund roll-up, our Food Bank will lose \$65,000, resulting in a reduction of workforce, and possibly the amount of food we have been able to distribute to the most vulnerable people in our communities, at this vulnerable time.

Sincerely,

Audrey Smith
Union County Manager and Regional Food
Bank Manager

cc The Honorable Peter Courtney, Senate President
The Honorable Tina Kotek, Speaker of the House
Representative Bobby Levy
Senator Bill Hansell
Representative Mark Owens
Senator Lynn Findley