

TO: House Committee on Business and Labor
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Policy Manager
RE: Support for SB 172 A
DATE: May 10, 2021



Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. We pursue this goal in two key ways: (1) we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today. Our Network of 21 regional food banks and 1,400 partner agencies continue to work tirelessly to ensure that Oregonians are able to put food on the table in the wake of this pandemic. (2) We work to change policies that create and perpetuate hunger and poverty.

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians experienced food insecurity. But in 2020, 1 in 4 families faced hunger - a dramatic increase. Oregon's unemployment system was stress-tested in 2020 like no other time in history. Tens of thousands of Oregonians faced significant wait times to receive UI, which played a role in longer lines of cars at Oregon's food pantries. Our state must prioritize minimizing the harm caused by our own systems and institutions as families across the state get back on their feet.

Overpayments of public benefits - while only representing a small fraction of cases and often caused due to unintentional administrative or client error - often result in harsh remedies that are destabilizing for families. **Oregon Food Bank supports SB 172 A** to enact common sense changes to the way OED collects overpayments and helps ensure these overpayments aren't creating yet another crisis for families facing economic hardship.

Currently when the Oregon Employment Department (OED) assesses an overpayment, if someone is still receiving benefits the agency can offset those benefits at 100%. What that means practically is that for families who are already struggling to make ends meet while receiving unemployment, they suddenly get \$0 in benefits until they have paid it all back. For families who face hardship affording food and paying rent while receiving unemployment benefits, suddenly getting \$0 can re-traumatize families who already face impossible choices about whether to pay for food, rent, or utilities. Making these modest changes to the way OED collects overpayments is a step in the right direction to preserve stability for family budgets.

We are grateful that SB 172 A passed 28-0 on the Senate Floor on April 22nd, and urge members of Oregon's House to take similarly swift and decisive action. This is our moment to embrace our shared values, care for each other and take bold action in support of *all* Oregonians so that we may emerge stronger.

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