

RE: Yes on SB 610

February 24, 2023

Honorable Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services:

My name is Ivonne Rivero. I am a Community Engagement Liaison and former Ambassador to the “Double Up Food Bucks, (DUFB)” program at the Oregon Food Bank. I live in SE Portland and I am writing in **support of Senate Bill 610**, Food For All Oregonians which would ensure all of our neighbors, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need to keep them and their families healthy.

In conducting outreach for the DUFB program in urban and agricultural areas, at community events across the Metro area, in Salem, Eugene, and many other areas where a lot of the Hispanic working class lives and works, we find that there is a lot of hunger. However, to access the additional nutritional benefits that DUFB has to offer, one must first be eligible for the SNAP program. Unfortunately, there’s people who out of fear don’t use SNAP benefits that their children could have, and there are also innumerable families who have either mixed status, are recently arriving, or don’t want to use benefits due to fear of persecution. Many established and recent Oregonians need to choose between paying for rent and utilities or putting food at the table. Many families are confronting situations on how to feed extended families: Their parents and grandparents, adults, children and babies.

Hunger was already a crisis in our communities before the pandemic, and the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have fallen hardest on immigrants and refugees who have long faced higher rates of hunger and poverty in Oregon. Just one example: Latinx and Pacific Islander Oregonians experienced hunger at twice the rate of white Oregonians pre-pandemic¹ – and this gap has only widened as our communities continue to struggle with COVID’s ongoing impact and the ensuing higher cost of goods, rent, fuel, staples like eggs and meat and the generalized increased cost of life, including public transportation.

Food For All Oregonians will create a state-funded program that eliminates exclusions to SNAP and make applying for assistance easier. As I mentioned, in many communities there are thousands of people who may qualify under the programs at present, but they lack the assistance or the trust to apply for the assistance that would allow them to buy

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https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/oregon_food_insecurity_rates_at_arrival_of_covid_2018-2020.pdf

the nourishing foods that they need. As mentioned earlier, people these days are debating between paying for rent and utilities or putting food at the table and we are seeing two or more families living under the same roof to be able to navigate the ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

I know that many low-income families cannot afford anything else than coffee or one meal a day. We know of families whose children eat all meals at school. The scarcity of food was only made worse by the pandemic and its economic aftermath. We know that in order to have a healthier community, healthier families, healthier workers, and better student outcomes, everything starts at the table; without this critical food support, we are likely to see a whole generation of people who have preventable diseases and negative health outcomes that will come with a cost to public health.

With your support of SB 610, we have the opportunity to address these issues by giving people access to the food they need for their physical and mental health. Food For All Oregonians makes food assistance available to all Oregonians who are currently excluded due to immigration status, it will provide families with money for groceries matching federal SNAP food assistance benefits, and community navigation and outreach, improved language access to ensure trust and community safety.

When all of our neighbors are getting the food that they need, all of Oregon thrives.

This is why I am urging your yes vote on SB 610. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Ivonne Rivero
Portland Oregon