



February 27, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Human Services
From: Fatima Jawaid Marty, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Re: Support for SB 610

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Fatima Jawaid Marty and I am the Food for All Oregonians (FFAO) campaign manager with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, who co-convenes this campaign with the Oregon Food Bank.

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.

We have been developing Food for All Oregonians in collaboration with our steering committee for almost two years. The Steering Committee is FFAO's leadership body of 5 community-based organizations focused on serving the immigrant, refugee and Compact of Free Association (also known as COFA) populations in Oregon. Current members of the Steering Committee include: Adelante Mujeres, Micronesian Islander Community, Unite Oregon, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), and the Latinx Immigrant and Family Wellness Hub. We also want to recognize and honor past Steering Committee members who were instrumental in the early stages of the campaign: Latino Network, COFA Alliance National Network (CANN), Living Islands, Centro Cultural, and Causa. We also have a growing coalition of over 100 organizations who have endorsed this campaign, and see the need for expanded food assistance across Oregon.

As all of our organizations know, increasing access to food assistance has long been a community need. Hunger was a crisis in our communities before the pandemic, and the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have fallen hardest on newly-arrived Oregonians. But, food assistance policies continue to leave about 62,000 immigrant, refugee, and COFA community members in Oregon behind, who would otherwise be eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as SNAP or food stamps) if not for immigration status.

To address this, we designed SB 610, the Food For All Oregonians Bill, which will do 3 things:

- It creates a state-funded program that eliminates exclusions to SNAP
- It builds on successful, community-driven navigator models to ensure trust and community safety
- It makes applying for assistance more welcoming and culturally responsive

The additional elements that SB 610 includes in addition to the benefit program is critical, and reflective of what we heard directly from impacted community members. It is often not enough for a benefit program to exist in and of itself, if our communities are not supported in accessing it. This bill also

intends for intentional outreach and direct assistance to impacted communities, and ensure efforts are both language inclusive and culturally responsive.

A key value of this campaign is to ensure that we are leading with the voices of those who are most impacted. I want to highlight that SB 610 holds Oregonians who are the most impacted at the center, and this bill was community informed and designed. We believe strongly that communities are experts in their experiences and that they know best what strategies and solutions will be able to meet their needs.

This is why FFAO coordinated a comprehensive community input phase that sought to hear the experiences from a variety of immigrant, refugees, and COFA communities across the state of Oregon. FFAO received in depth information about individual's experiences around food and benefit access, as well as what solutions they thought would be helpful. Everything that we learned through this process has been central to the shaping of our solutions and strategies in SB 610.

Here is an overview of Food for All Oregonians' community input work:

- FFAO partnered with 14 immigrant, refugee, and COFA organizations across the state that already had strong trust and relationships built with the communities they served.
- In Spring 2022, these organizations conducted a series of community input activities that took the form of listening circles, one-on-one conversations, and an online survey
- Activities were conducted in 16 different languages, and FFAO received input from over 400 Oregonians in 13 counties, with over 20 population groups represented.
- Individual responses were compiled, translated, and then analyzed for overarching trends and patterns. These themes were taken to inform potential solutions in SB 610

I also want to share why this bill is personally important to me.

I am a first generation American, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Pakistan over 30 years ago after my mother fell in love with the country after completing her Physics master's program in Chicago. I am the only one in my family who was born in the U.S., and I clearly remember the moment in which my parents and sisters naturalized. Those first 5 years in the United States were not easy for my parents as they struggled to find work and to make ends meet.

I can repeat to you verbatim the carefully curated grocery list my father brought every week: bananas, apples, lentils, milk, rice, eggs, potatoes, onions, and a bag of frozen peas. I used to be resentful of eating a pot of lentils and rice for a week straight, and would try to infiltrate my father's grocery trips in hopes of acquiring something else like a yogurt cup or a fruit snack. It wasn't until many years later that I realized that my parents did what was necessary for our family to survive, to have enough food on the table for week to week. How lucky I was to have even that.

Even though they were legal permanent residents, my family was not eligible for SNAP when they first arrived. Even after they had naturalized, my parents refused to participate in the program believing that it would risk their immigration status and ability to stay in the country.

Access to food is a human right. We need to ensure that all of our communities have access to the food they need to thrive, regardless of their immigration status. We need to remove the stigma for immigrants accessing critical support systems that help support their families. Let's have Oregon make food

assistance more equitable and inclusive, just as we have for health care, driver licenses, and tax credits.

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

Sincerely,

Fatima Jawaid Marty
Campaign Manager, Food for All Oregonians
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon