



26 February 2023

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, I write in support of Senate Bill 856, which would establish the COFA Food Assistance Program, to make sure that our COFA community here in Oregon has access to the food they need. My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of MWVCAA, where we serve low-income residents of Marion, Polk and nine other counties across Oregon. Annually we provide more than \$70 million in services and direct client assistance for housing, homelessness, energy and weatherization, and early learning programs to more than 55,000 Oregonians in poverty. We also sponsor the USDA nutrition program in eleven Oregon counties, to make sure that children in Oregon's family-based child care centers have access to healthy and nutritious meals.

Food scarcity is a gathering and growing concern in Oregon. Prior to the pandemic, many across Oregon went to bed hungry each night. In the past three years, however, the situation has grown more dire. Our food bank need in some regions has increased 350 percent. The federal Child Tax Credit, a critical public policy that moved millions out of poverty, has expired, and last month the emergency food stamp benefits came to an end in Oregon, which will reduce food stamp benefits for some households by 33 percent.

The crisis and need is both general, and specific, but most keenly felt among communities of color, who have labored under greater rates of food scarcity, and often had to rely on cheaper, less nutritious foods. People of color, in particular, have shouldered the greatest economic burdens during the pandemic, and recent rent increases, perhaps as much as 14.6 percent, will make household disposable income even less, as budgets will stress again to accommodate the reduced services and benefits, in a time of high inflation and rental increases. Before the pandemic Latinx and Pacific Islander communities were more than twice as likely to experience hunger, and those rates are certain to grow more disparate in 2023.

MWVCAA works to help break the cycle of generational poverty. We believe that housing, shelter, dignity, and food are basic human rights. This Program will provide vital nutrition assistance to COFA communities who would have, but for their immigration status, qualified for the SNAP program.

We urge your support on SB 856, and quick passage out of the Committee. All children and families in Oregon deserve a healthy life.

Respectfully,

Jimmy Jones  
Executive Director