



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of SB 610

February 27, 2023

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, I am the State Representative for House District 46, representing Southeast Portland. I am proud to be a sponsor of SB 610, alongside many of my colleagues and with the support of numerous community organizations behind us, to ensure that Food For All Oregonians is a reality.

Access to healthy food is a human right, but one in eight Oregonians face hunger. SB 610 would create a **state-funded food security program** that would include Oregonians who would otherwise qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (**SNAP**) but are currently excluded due to their immigration status.

Before I worked in the legislature, I worked at APANO, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon and had the great privilege of working with COFA communities. COFA stands for Compact of Free Association and includes residents of the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. From 1946 to 1958, the United States Government detonated the nuclear equivalent to 7,200 Hiroshima bombs on and around these islands, obliterating whole islands, devastating their natural ecosystems, and forcing thousands of people to leave their home. They then stored that nuclear waste on the Enewetak Atoll, and put it under a concrete dome that is now at risk of collapsing because of rising sea levels and other impacts of climate change.

The United States Congress entered into compacts to provide for the health and security of COFA citizens who remain in their home countries and provide the right for COFA citizens to live and work here in the United States. However, when COFA citizens immigrate to the United States, COFA citizens are excluded from many essential low-income, federal services such as higher-education loans, Medicaid, TANF and SNAP programs. These communities are here because the United States bombed their islands and continues to endanger their homeland communities with inadequate nuclear storage.

While there are important programs working to support our community members with steady access to food, more than 62,000 of our neighbors are excluded from these services, based only on their immigration status or status as a graduate student. Immigrants and grad students are an important part of our statewide job force and a large fraction of the individuals facing food insecurity today. We know our outreach services need to be improved so that Oregonians who are now going to be eligible for these services take up these resources to help their family – we've seen the need for improved outreach to some of our most vulnerable communities to guide them through our tax system with the Earned Income Tax Credit, our criminal justice

system with defendant rights, and our higher education navigation systems. Food assistance must follow as well.

I urge your support on SB 610 to ensure our state food assistance programs are reaching all those in need. Thank you!

¹https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/oregon_food_insecurity_rates_at_arrival_of_covid_2018-2020.pdf