

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

My name is Mary Howells and I live in Albany, OR 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.

Having consistent access to healthy, nourishing food is a universal human right. I am anticipating there will be people who oppose Bill 610 because they do not want their taxpayer money to go towards helping undocumented immigrants and the unhoused populations. Depriving anyone of food because we feel they do not “deserve” food assistance should not be something that is even entertained, let alone be common practice. This is especially heinous in the world’s wealthiest country, where lack of funds is not a reason for why any person faces starvation. Oregon can become a leader in adequately feeding its population and set an admirable example for the rest of the country.

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. Immigrants, refugees and Compact of Free Association (COFA) community members, in particular, 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 rising cost of living.

Food for All Oregonians will create a state-funded program that eliminates exclusions to SNAP and make applying for assistance more welcoming. The passing of this bill would greatly assist those who receive federal SNAP food assistance benefits, essentially doubling the amount of food assistance for struggling Oregonians. And those who have been excluded due to their immigration status, who still pay taxes despite receiving virtually none of the services they help to fund, would be able to taste the fruits of their hard labor. Our goal as a society should be to empower vulnerable populations by doing our best to remove unnecessary struggles on a systemic level. Increasing access to food by passing Bill 610 would be a great step forward in reaching this goal.

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

We know that when we all have access to food, we're all better off. Kids do better in school, our families' health and well-being improves, and our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. This is true in every corner of Oregon—in rural, urban, and suburban communities alike. When all of our neighbors are getting the food that they need, all of Oregon thrives. Your decision today will reflect where your priorities lie.

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

Sincerely,
Mary Howells