

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

For the record, I am Jackie Leung, Executive Director of the Micronesian Islander Community and co-chair with the Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs. I am writing to you in support of SB 610, the Food For All Oregonians bill.

There is no question that Oregon is an immigrant state. One in ten Oregon residents is an immigrant, while one in nine residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent.¹ Hunger rates have increased exponentially within the community. According to Oregon Food Bank Network report, Oregon's food insecurity rate rose 21% between 2019 and 2020, seeing as many as 1.7 million people seeking food assistance from the Oregon Food Bank Network.² Immigrants, refugees, and Compact of Free Association (COFA) citizens experience significant food shortages, exacerbated by the economic impact of COVID-19. Latinx and Pacific Islanders (including COFA citizens) reported hunger at two times the rate of white Oregonians and this gap continues to increase.³

In the past five years, the Micronesian Islander Community has seen a significant increase in demand for food and resources from the COFA community. MIC's monthly food box and grocery shopping distribution events see between 40-60 households, equaling up to 400 individuals, with additional people who contact us seeking housing, legal assistance, and other support services. At our last event, we registered 51 households, totaling 339 people.

Despite our best efforts, we know that food pantries and access to food boxes alone will not end hunger in our communities. It's important for this discussion to note that the Micronesian Community and the Pacific Islander Community in Oregon are diverse, and SB 610 is designed to address this diversity. While a number of Micronesians are COFA citizens, there are others who do not. SB 610 ensures all Oregon residents, Micronesian COFA citizens, and other Asian, Micronesian & Pacific Islanders who are not COFA citizens are eligible.

SB 610 mirrors federal SNAP benefits, to ensure that Lawful Permanent Residents, Citizens from the Compact of Free Association (COFA) citizens, and other Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees - no matter where we are born - will have access to food assistance under SB 610. In addition, the bill will fund a community navigation program that will improve outreach with cultural specific services and language specific support to connect families and individuals to much needed resources. The navigation program is an integral part of SB 610. With access to culturally appropriate language

services and support, we will be able to reach individuals and families to provide education, enrollment, and ensure that they have access to SNAP.

As a state built by the backs of immigrant labor, we strongly urge you to pass SB 610. SB 610 will ensure that all Oregonians have access to food. No one should go to bed hungry.

Sincerely,

Jackie Leung, Executive Director
Micronesia Islander Community

[1] American Immigration Council: Immigrants in Oregon.

https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_oregon.pdf

[2] Oregon Food Bank Network Report.

<https://www.oregon.gov/fooddrive/Documents/2022OregonFoodBankNetworkHungerFacts.pdf>

[3] Edwards, M. and Beck, K. Oregon's Food Insecurity Rate at the Arrival of COVID

(2018-2020). https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/oregon_food_insecurity_rates_at_arrival_of_covid_2018-2020.pdf

[4] Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO). (2015). COFA Fact Sheet.

https://www.apano.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/apano-COFA_final4.pdf