

Chair Gelser Blouin
Vice Chair Robinson
Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services

RE: SB 609

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and members of the Committee, my name is Jacen Greene. I am the Assistant Director of the Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC) at Portland State University (PSU). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 609.

In my role at HRAC, I helped manage a comprehensive survey of student basic needs. The survey was administered in the fall of 2019, and all students enrolled at PSU were invited to participate. A total of 3,511 students (15% of all students) participated, and the findings revealed that 37% of graduate students experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey. Students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and students with a disability or medical condition experienced disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity. One student respondent said, "I am a [teaching assistant] and a [research assistant] at PSU and these two jobs together don't cover rent [and] food. I have a third job at a private company to be able to buy anything beyond basic necessities, which makes performing well in school more difficult."

Student food insecurity dramatically impacts student learning and success. One study at the University of Maryland found that "students who had experienced severe FI [food insecurity] were nearly 15 times more likely to have failed courses and were 6 times more likely to have withdrawn or failed to register for more courses." The Hope Center at Temple University has reported lower grades nationwide among students experiencing any kind of basic needs insecurity.

Expanding SNAP work requirements to include hours worked as a graduate assistant would directly benefit PSU students. As demonstrated in our survey, more than a third of graduate students experience hunger. This impacts their health, academic performance, and retention. Making it easier for them to qualify for SNAP benefits would make them more likely to graduate, and in turn enable them to fill essential employment gaps across the state, become self-sufficient, earn higher incomes, and generate greater future tax revenue. A small change now can generate significant positive impacts in the future, which is why Oregon public universities support this bill.

I and my colleagues would be honored to serve as a resource on this topic if needed. Thank you for your service and consideration of this legislation.

Jacen Greene
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