

Community Connection



Community Action Agency

Area Agency on Aging (Dist. 13)
Community Housing Development Organization
Youth and Intergenerational Program Agency

Of Union County

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc.

March 3, 2023

TO: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction
FROM: Audrey Smith, Regional Food Bank Manager, Community Connection of
Northeast Oregon, Inc.
RE: Support for Emergency Food Purchasing (HB 5045)
DATE: March 3, 2023

Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request for support of local food banks. I am the Regional Food Bank Manager for Community Connection of Northeast Oregon. We distribute food to people in need in Union, Baker, Grant, and Wallowa Counties. We work with 15 local Food Pantries and have 15 produce programs throughout the region. In Fiscal Year 2022, these local food pantries provided 9,453 food boxes to 22,035 people, while 18,331 people benefitted from 8,642 produce pickups at senior centers and other sites. A total of 845,130 pounds of food was distributed.

Food Pantry access has risen steadily since the end of Fiscal Year 22, and January's food box numbers are 30% higher than the average monthly food boxes from fiscal year 2022. As families face significant financial challenges compounded by the rising cost of living and the expiration of SNAP Emergency Allotments, and food systems continue to experience significant disruption, we request the \$7,500,000 state investment in emergency food purchasing as part of HB5045. This funding will ensure an adequate emergency food supply for Oregonians through the end of June 2023.

\$7,500,000 will allow Oregon Food Bank to bridge the gap in food supply by purchasing, and distributing across Oregon, approximately 6,300,000 million pounds of food (or 5,229,000 meals) through the OFB Network. Across our state, this would provide a layer of protection against hunger and other economic risks for families already struggling.

Traditional sources of funding and food donations continue to face disruption:

- Donations from large-scale food producers (e.g. General Mills) to the Oregon Food Bank have dropped by roughly 50% over the course of the pandemic, with no return to normal donation levels in sight;

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- A critical US Department of Agriculture program called TEFAP has become unreliable due to reductions in funding and supply chain disruptions — resulting in inconsistent federal food supplies reaching Oregon;
- Due to the rise in global food costs, our ability to purchase food for distribution has been weakened.

Without continued state investment, we will not be able to meet this rising need. We request that the Legislature, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Human Services, appropriate \$7.5 million to Oregon Food Bank for the purchase and distribution of emergency food supplies to families throughout the state.

We greatly appreciate the Legislature's commitment to addressing food insecurity across rural, urban and suburban communities — and hope to partner with you again to address this emerging crisis. Please let us know how we can best work with you to keep food flowing in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Audrey A. Smith".

Audrey Smith
Regional Food Bank Manager
Community Connection