

Submitter: Mary Carman

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Measure: SB5506

Chairs Steiner and Sanchez; Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith; Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary Carman, and I live and work in Salem. I am speaking to you today in support of Senate Bill 610, Food For All Oregonians. I don't need to tell you what this bill is about, but I will say that it is unconscionable that there are 62,000 individuals living in Oregon, mostly immigrants, refugees, and COFA community members, who are ineligible for SNAP benefits, which are crucial and lifesaving. We know that BIPOC individuals suffer from food insecurity at staggeringly high rates – about three times that of white Oregonians, and it is time that we take a stand and fight for them.

I'll be honest, I find myself frustrated that the lived experience of hunger of my Black and brown siblings is not enough to push this bill forward, that it hasn't been enough in previous years to provide for them the nourishment and dignity they deserve. As an employee of Marion Polk Food Share, I have learned of the extremes in Salem and rural Polk County, the areas in which I primarily work. And while I am glad that I can raise my loud voice and advocate for the hungry, that I see so many people around me today, just like I saw on Advocacy Day back on the 12th, I am exhausted. At last year's National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference, I heard a statement that will stick with me for the rest of my life: "Hungry people are desperate people." Forget the budget – what a stain on our state that we are sending children to bed hungry and desperate. Shame on us.

Today, I ask you to find the money. I trust that you can find the money and that you will find the money because it is far too expensive to let Oregonians live in poverty. The social determinants of health prove that nutritious food improves school attendance, test scores, and social interactions and lowers risks of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Further, when households are armed with the dignity to shop for their own food and not rely exclusively on one of my partner agencies, that money will go back into our local economy.

I'll admit I don't know the first thing about running a state budget, but I know a lot of things, from my lived experience as a woman of color to my education at Oregon State University to my employment at Marion Polk Food Share, about hunger. And I testify today that we must pass this bill because if we do not, it will be to the detriment of our entire state.

Thank you.