

To: Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and members of the Senate Human Services Committee
From: Bridget Budbill, Legislative Advocate at the Oregon Law Center
Re: Senate Bill 1585 – Exploring SNAP benefits expansion to include hot foods
Date: February 7, 2024

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

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I ask that you support [Senate Bill \(SB\) 1585](#). This bill requires the Oregon Department of Human Services to convene a work group tasked with exploring any opportunities available under federal law to expand Oregon’s nutrition choices under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including how to cover ready-made hot food options for eligible participants.

Why the Oregon Law Center supports SB 1585’s proposed work group:

SB 1585 is an opportunity for Oregon for a work group to see what it would take to modify our existing federal SNAP program to access an existing federal Restaurant Meals Program.¹ The results of the work group would help frame Oregon’s next steps towards becoming among the nine other states that currently allow their SNAP programs to include the Restaurant Meals Program in some form. Accessing this program would allow qualifying seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons who are houseless to use SNAP benefits at restaurants offering ready-made hot meals. This program would, if expanded in Oregon, only apply to restaurants who have opted-in to participating. Participating restaurants would not be required to verify a participant’s eligibility, as each eligible SNAP participant’s benefits card would be specifically coded for access to the program.

The Oregon Law Center also applauds the inclusion of work group membership representative of folks who have lived experience as SNAP participants, as lived experience is subject matter expertise.

Why the Oregon Law Center’s clients would benefit from potential SNAP expansion:

The Oregon Law Center serves clients who are seniors, have disabilities, are houseless, and increasingly, clients who possess *all* of those qualities at once. These are folks who may not be able to prepare hot food in their homes, because the physical act of cooking is unmanageable, or they may not have kitchens to store and prepare food, at all. Hot, ready-made food can be a lifeline for folks who struggle to prepare nutritious food and for our neighbors who are unsheltered during dangerously cold weather.

Additionally, one of the most insidious aspects of poverty is isolation. Expanding access to hot food for seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons who are houseless also provides a modest but meaningful opportunity for persons who are often very isolated to participate in the world around them, by having a hot meal prepared at a local participating restaurant.

¹ “Restaurant Meals Program,” Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Last modified December 23, 2023. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer/restaurant-meals-program>. States with active Restaurant Meals Programs include Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia.



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How SB 1585 fits into changing the food insecurity landscape for all Oregonians:

Analysis performed by the Oregon State University’s Oregon Policy Analysis Laboratory (OPAL) on food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how historic investments in anti-hunger programs significantly stemmed what could have been a catastrophic doubling of food-insecure Oregonians.² What this research tells us is that hunger does respond, and quickly, to action and investment. Recently released OPAL food insecurity data also tells us that food insecurity is more prevalent amongst Oregon’s communities of color³ and has grown significantly in the last few years in rural areas of our state, among other things.⁴

We know that SB 1585, alone, will not result in a hunger-free Oregon. But its success could open the door to more opportunities for leveraging existing federal programs to decrease hunger for some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you very much for your consideration of SB 1585. Please reach out with questions any time.

Sincerely,

Bridget

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The Oregon Law Center’s mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services.

² Mark Edwards, “Surprising Stability in Oregon and U.S. Food Insecurity During the COVID Pandemic,” Oregon Policy Analysis Laboratory, Oregon State University, 1-2, September 21, 2021 (accessed February 6, 2024). <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/opal2021oregonfoodinsecurityupdateseptember.pdf>.

³ Mark Edwards and Julian McElhaney, “Food Insecurity in Oregon During the COVID Public Health Emergency (2020-2022),” Oregon Policy Analysis Laboratory, Oregon State University, 4, September 21, 2021 (accessed February 6, 2024). https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/2023-12/oregon_food_insecurity_rates_2020-2022.pdf

⁴ *Id.* at 3.