

February 7, 2024

Honorable Members of the Oregon State Legislature,

I am writing to urge your support for Senate Bill 1518, which is a critical measure aimed at ensuring equitable access to public assistance, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, for citizens of the Freely Associated States (COFA citizens) residing in Oregon. The COFA Micronesian people legally enter and reside in the United States, are actively contributing members of our communities who dutifully pay all local, state, and federal taxes. We proudly serve in the US military and have established our lives here under a unique treaty with the United States, a treaty that involved the relinquishment of our islands to support US military strategies. Despite their significant contributions and sacrifices, COFA citizens often find themselves excluded from accessing essential and basic social services and resources.

Many COFA Micronesian immigrants hold frontline essential positions, performing crucial roles that contribute to Oregon's local and state economy. Like many others, we work tirelessly in occupations that are vital to our Oregon economic vitality and often receive low wages. Despite our contributions and tax obligations, we continue to face unjust barriers in accessing basic necessities such as food assistance.

Senate Bill 1518 seeks to address this issue by prohibiting the Department of Human Services from denying public assistance based on COFA citizens' immigration status. By ensuring equitable access to SNAP benefits, this bill will provide much-needed support to COFA families facing economic hardship, thereby promoting fairness and inclusivity in our state.

It is essential to recognize that COFA residents living in Oregon fulfill all tax obligations, contributing to the funding of programs that assist low-income families. However, they are unfairly excluded from accessing these very services themselves. This discrepancy underscores the urgent need for legislative action to address systemic inequities and ensure that all residents, regardless of their background, have equal access to essential support services.

As representatives entrusted with the well-being of all Oregonians, I implore you to support Senate Bill 1518 and stand in solidarity with COFA communities in our state. Let us demonstrate our commitment to justice, fairness, and inclusion by ensuring that all residents have equal access to the resources and services they need to thrive.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Bennie Moses-Mesubed

COFA Alliance National Network