

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, and I am the State Senator for District 10, representing South and West Salem, Monmouth, and Independence. I am here today to urge your support for SB 452, which appropriates funds to Marion Polk Food Share (MPFS) to enable the purchase and construction of a new facility. SB 459 is vital in addressing the alarming rise of food insecurity in Oregon. Let me give you some background.

MPFS is a unique and essential nonprofit in the Mid-Willamette Valley. It is not a food pantry. It is, rather, a critical capacity-building organization. MPFS distributes food for individuals and families to several dozen food pantries and meal sites throughout the rural and urban communities in the valley. They deliver Meals on Wheels to over 1000 homebound seniors and adults with disabilities, with a waitlist of hundreds more whom they cannot serve due to current space constraints.

MPFS plays a critical role in many of our communities, providing food assistance to over 58,000 people every month. However, the current facility was designed decades ago and cannot adequately meet the growing need in the region. Since the pandemic, food assistance needs in Marion and Polk counties have surged. Visits have increased by 60 percent and the demand for Meals on Wheels has risen by 55 percent to the highest in its history. Why?

The cost of housing is up 30% in the last five years, the cost of food is up 30% in the last five years. SNAP benefits are static, and we do not know what will happen to SNAP benefits in the future. Some people are too afraid or too proud to apply for those benefits. This bill effects constituents in many of our districts, and many of those Senators and Representatives are here from both side of the aisle to testify in support of this bill today.

SB 452 will help MPFS acquire and remodel a state-of-the-art warehouse and kitchen, creating a more efficient hub for food distribution and meal preparation. The new facility will expand cold storage capacity, streamline volunteer efforts, and unify the Meals on Wheels kitchen. SB 452 will ensure that MPFS can meet the increased demand for nutritious, fresh food across rural and urban communities in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

This bill is a vital step toward addressing hunger and food insecurity in our state. By investing in infrastructure needed to meet rising demand, we can reduce hunger for nearly 60,000 Oregonians per month.

Colleagues, I urge your support for SB 452 and the life-sustaining work it will enable. Thank you.