

Submitter: Martha Verduzco-Ortega
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB611

Dear Oregon State Legislature, My name is Martha Verduzco-Ortega, and I am proud to be the president and founder of the Hood River Latino Network and the Director of the Hood River Immigrant Help Center. I work closely with our local immigrant population and the orchardists who often employ them. I am also a dedicated community organizer, a mother, a musician, and, importantly, a voter. Last year, Senate Bill 610 was allowed to languish in committee, denying food to many hungry Oregonians. You now have the opportunity to rectify this oversight with a renewed commitment to inclusivity and compassion. Senate Bill 611, "Food for All," is vital for our state's well-being. This bill would enable ALL Oregonians to access SNAP benefits, including our undocumented immigrant families—who, let's remember, are our neighbors, our contributors to the economy, and essential members of our society. Consider this: the majority of immigrants in Oregon hold jobs, with their employment rate surpassing that of the native-born population. They constitute 13% of our labor force and nearly 30% of the agricultural workforce. In 2018 alone, undocumented immigrants in Oregon paid an estimated \$205 million in federal taxes and \$120.2 million in state and local taxes. They live in our communities, raise their families here, work hard, and contribute to our state's prosperity. Among the undocumented population, approximately 15,000 are children and about 8,000 are elderly. Many of these individuals face unique vulnerabilities exacerbated by your policies. Children and the elderly, often living below the poverty line, find themselves in need of basic sustenance. Moreover, many U.S.-born children live with at least one undocumented parent, complicating their access to food. This is not just about policy; it's about the human right to nourishment. While many challenges faced by Oregon's immigrant communities—such as poverty, racism, and discrimination—are systemic and difficult to address, hunger is one accessible problem that you can solve. Going hungry is preventable, and YOU, as representatives of Oregon, have the power to change this reality. As a sanctuary state, Oregon has declared its commitment to compassion and justice for all residents, regardless of immigration status. I urge you to support and pass Senate Bill 611, "Food for All." Your role as lawmakers is to advocate for the welfare of ALL Oregonians. This bill will provide essential support to our children and elderly population, ensuring they have access to the food they need to thrive. Hunger undermines children's ability to learn and traps the elderly in a cycle of poor health. You have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference. I implore you to take a stand and show integrity and compassion for Oregon's most vulnerable populations. Let's ensure this bill doesn't meet the same fate as its predecessor. Together, we can create a more inclusive and thriving Oregon for everyone. Thank you for your attention. Warm regards, Martha Verduzco-Ortega President & Founder, Hood River Latino Network Director, Hood River Immigrant Help Center