



To: Senate Committee on Human Services
From: Oregon Rural Action
Re: Support for SB 611

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

My name is Kristin Anderson Ostrom. I am the Executive Director of Oregon Rural Action, a 501(c)3 grassroots organization led by community members in rural Eastern Oregon. We strongly support Senate Bill 611, Food For All Oregonians.

Our rural region's economy is dominated by industrial agriculture. Immigrant farmworkers and their families are the backbone of that economy, working to grow and produce food for Oregon and the entire world – but too often, their wages fail to provide them with the income necessary to ensure their families do not go hungry. In addition, these workers pay taxes but are excluded from receiving SNAP benefits meant to assist low-income working families and ensure their basic needs are met.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrant farmworkers were deemed essential workers, and throughout the pandemic they continued to work on our region's large farms, on dairies, and in food processing centers. During the pandemic, the Oregon Health Authority provided food boxes to workers and their families; we worked with community-based organizations to expand and implement OHA's outreach efforts, delivering these essential food boxes at local pop-up vaccine clinics on farms, at taquerias, and at food markets. Though the need for these food boxes remains, they are no longer available to those who need them.

Immigrant Oregonians are twice as likely to face hunger and poverty. Across Oregon, 1 in 6 children don't have enough to eat, and one-third more Oregonians face hunger than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Food pantries are confronting record-breaking levels of demand, with Oregon Food Bank reporting that need has reached levels never before seen in its 40+ years of work.

Finally, **Food is a basic Human Right**. Our freedom, our health, and our ability to thrive all depend on access to basic food. Those who work tirelessly to feed Oregon are once again going hungry themselves, and they need – and deserve – our support.

SB 611 is an important step forward. Modeled after similar programs in five other states, including Washington, Food for All Oregonians can ensure that all Youth and Elderly Oregonians have access to basic food to reduce hunger and keep all families healthy.

We urge you to pass SB 611, Food for All Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Kristin Anderson Ostrom
Executive Director