



Live a Healthier Life

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March 11, 2025

Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services

Dear Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderamma, and Members of the Committee:

Re: Senate Bill 5526 - Support for Critical Community Food Assistance

On behalf of the Helping Hands Coalition, we want to express our support for increasing funding through the Oregon Hunger Response Fund. This funding is crucial in delivering essential food assistance to individuals and families in need across Oregon. Your support makes a real difference in the lives of those struggling, helping to ensure that no one has to go hungry.

The demand for food assistance has surged, with one-third more Oregonians facing hunger than before the pandemic. In the past year, 2.5 million visits to food assistance sites across the Oregon Food Network were recorded, a 31% increase from the previous year. A \$15 million funding gap exists to maintain essential services, highlighting the urgent need for support during this hunger crisis.

In our local Oregon rural area of Western Lane County, the Helping Hands Coalition anticipates a 106% increase in meals served, projecting growth from 3,938 meals in the pre-pandemic year of 2020 to 8,120 meals by 2025. While we take pride in the success of our Community Social Health program, which helps clients achieve self-sufficiency and lower health disparities, we still require \$265,000 to sustain our program and continue nurturing our partnerships with local pantries, meal sites, and shelters.

Many of our neighbors face significant socioeconomic challenges, and food banks may be their only lifeline. Food insecurity affects Oregonians of all ages and backgrounds, impacting health, education, and productivity. The funding we're requesting will aid food distribution, operational costs, and community-specific programs.

I urge you to recognize the essential role of food banks in supporting our communities. Increasing funding is not just a crisis response; it's an investment in a future where no one in Oregon goes hungry. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rick Chilton

Rick Chilton, President

Community Social-Health Center

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