

Submitter: Casey Wheeler

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5526

Date: March 11, 2025

Name: Casey Wheeler

Organization: Columbia Pacific Food Bank

Location: St. Helens, Oregon

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

On behalf of the Columbia Pacific Food Bank, the regional food bank for Columbia County, we strongly support the increased funding through the Oregon Hunger Response Fund to provide critical food assistance throughout the state. In Columbia County, we provide food security that serves as a lifeline to thousands of families and individuals facing food insecurity. As we have seen over the past few years, the need for food assistance has only increased, along with the cost of purchasing food with not signs that it will decrease in the near future.

One-third more Oregonians are experiencing hunger now than before the pandemic. Last year, we had 17,000 visits to 7 food assistance sites in Columbia County. This was a 14.4% increase in households and 19.6% increase in individuals comprising those households. We are in the midst of an ongoing hunger crisis and we have the opportunity to address meaningful change in this legislative session. In a survey among Oregon's regional food programs, a gap of \$15 million was identified to maintain existing services. Without these funds, the end result is more people receiving less food.

In Columbia County, we were serving approximately 2,500 individuals a month pre-pandemic. Last month, we fed 4,138 which greatly exceeds the number of individuals we served at any time during the pandemic. To sustain food assistance operations and partnerships with local pantries and meal sites, we need \$500,000 for the next biennium.

Many of our neighbors are only one paycheck from having to make difficult decisions between rent, food, transportation and other needs. Food insecurity impacts all of them, regardless of age, ethnicities and backgrounds, and it is a direct barrier to health, education and productivity. The funding requested today will directly support food distribution, operational costs and programs that target specific needs within our

community.

I urge you to recognize the vital work that we do and the critical role we play in sustaining the health and well-being of our county. Increased funding is not just a response to a crisis; it is an investment in Oregon's future- a future where no one goes hungry. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Casey Wheeler, Executive Director
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