

Submitter: Lindsay Grosvenor

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB611

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services FROM: Oregon Food Bank Southeast Oregon Services (Ontario Branch) SUBJECT: Yes on SB 611 Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee, My name is Lindsay Grosvenor, and I am the Southeast Oregon Regional Manager for Oregon Food Bank Southeast Solt Oregon Services. Our branch, based in Ontario, Oregon provides emergency food assistance throughout Malheur and Harney Counties. We are in strong support of Senate Bill 611, Food For All Oregonians which would ensure Youth and Elderly Oregonians, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need to keep them and their families healthy. Our organization continues to respond to staggering spikes in food insecurity – the worst in 100 years. Hunger was a crisis in our community before the pandemic, however, since 2023, the reported number of families seeking emergency food from our main partner agency in Ontario has now tripled. Increased inflation, housing costs, and reduced SNAP benefits have significantly worsened the crisis. Rural areas like Malheur and Harney counties are especially hard-hit, with a 38% increase in food assistance since before the pandemic, totaling over 61,000 visits last year. Malheur County has one of the worst poverty rates in Oregon at 26%, compared to the state average of 17%. (Oregon Hunger Task Force, 2019). Nearly 40,000 people live in Malheur and Harney counties and community members in this region are particularly diverse. Many of the towns in Malheur county are close to majority Latinx making up 45% of the population and 33.7% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (US Census, 2020). Many of these individuals are agricultural farmworkers, who help to grow and harvest food for our community, yet are ineligible for SNAP benefits to feed themselves and their families due to their immigration status. There are also other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities of Japanese American, indigenous tribes, and migrant workers in surrounding rural and frontier communities. Due to the exceptional rurality of the area, food supplies may travel as much as 300 miles by truck and both counties have low food access rates (formerly called food deserts) – many communities rely on gas station convenience stores (USDA, 2023) or drive several hours to reach a grocery store. We acknowledge that food banking alone is not a permanent solution to ending hunger and will require all of us to take bold action and work together to address the root causes of hunger in our communities. We know that when we all have access to food, our community is stronger. Kids do better in school, our families' health and well-being improves, and our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. If you, like me, believe that food is a basic human right, we must prioritize SB 611. In solidarity, Lindsay Grosvenor