



**American
Heart
Association.**

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

Date: March 13, 2025

Re: Senate Bill 5526

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Christina Bodamer, and I am a Senior Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association and a member of the Oregon Hunger Task Force, here today in support of SB 5526, specifically to share our support for continued funding for Double Up Food Bucks and for the Elderly Senior Application Project found in the agency budget.

What would you do if you were hungry? Many of us are lucky enough not to have to think about where your next meal is coming from, but for far too many in Oregon that live in a household that struggles to afford food, this is a daily part of reality.

Double Up Food Bucks helps families stretch their dollars to buy the healthier options they want, and more children are shown and taught healthy behaviors, taking the first step toward establishing lifelong habits that will support their overall health and wellness for years beyond their enrollment in SNAP programs.

While there are health benefits of eating a healthy diet for everyone, eating more fruits and vegetables can improve overall health for SNAP participants in particular, often reducing the incidence of chronic diseases like heart disease and type II diabetes. Data from projects across the nation show that programs like Double Up Food Bucks help to increase the overall Healthy Eating Index – a key measure of Americans diet quality – as well as the fruit and vegetable components of the Healthy Eating Index score. Simply put, when given the opportunity to buy fruits and vegetables, participants spend more of their benefits on these healthy items, increasing the quality of their diet. In fact, Double Up users don't just eat more produce than the average SNAP participant, they eat more produce than the average American.

SNAP incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks show that it is possible to adjust the SNAP program to improve nutrition without increasing stigma for participants or burden on retailers.

The Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) is a demonstration project that seeks to increase participation among the older adult (60 years or older) low-income population facing barriers to participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). It is designed to increase the efficiency of SNAP and improve delivery of SNAP benefits to eligible households by streamlining the application and certification process. SNAP plays a crucial role in addressing hunger and poverty and the American Heart Association supports any program that makes the application to these programs easier. People with heart disease experience high food insecurity rates and it's essential for people to be able to afford medications and still be able to eat a balanced diet.

Oregon can do more than just provide low-income neighbors with food; we can provide them with healthy food. In a state that is as bountiful as ours with locally grown produce around nearly every corner, more must be done to provide access to healthy fruits and vegetables for everyone.

I am asking for your help today in creating an Oregon where no one is hungry by supporting Senate Bill 5526.