



March 11th ,2025

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services
FROM: Jayden Ruff
Subject: Yes on SB 611

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

My name is Jayden Ruff, I am the Director of the South Coast Health Equity Coalition. I am writing to express our strong support and endorsement of SB 611, the Food for All Oregonians bill. This critical legislation will help ensure that all Oregonians—regardless of immigration status—have access to the nutrition assistance they need to thrive.

At the South Coast Health Equity Coalition, our mission is to work alongside Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Two-Spirit, and LGBTQIA+ communities to create common ground through educational, cultural, and community-driven activities that foster wholeness and well-being. Through deep equity work, we advocate for fair access to healthcare, address social determinants of health, and dismantle systemic barriers to create inclusive spaces that embrace diversity, health, and holistic wellness for all.

Access to nutritious, culturally familiar food is a fundamental right, not a privilege determined by birthplace. Yet, Oregon is facing a hunger crisis:

- 1 in 6 children in Oregon do not have enough to eat, and food insecurity has increased by one-third since before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Despite paying billions in taxes, immigrant Oregonians are twice as likely to face hunger and poverty due to exclusion from food assistance programs.
- Food pantries across the state are facing record-breaking demand, with the Oregon Food Bank experiencing its highest levels of need in over 40 years.

These barriers weaken Oregon's economy, destabilize communities, and strain healthcare, education, and housing systems. SB 611 is a critical step toward ensuring no child, elder, or working family in Oregon goes hungry.

Expanding food assistance benefits not only alleviates hunger but also strengthens entire communities:

- Health Equity: Food access leads to better health outcomes, lower healthcare costs, and reduced hospitalization rates.
- Behavioral Health: Nutrition access has been proven to reduce rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.
- Education & Early Learning: Children with access to proper nutrition perform better in school, have lower absenteeism rates, and develop stronger social skills.
- Economic Stability: Food assistance is a homelessness prevention tool, helping families stay housed and employed while supporting local businesses.

Five other states, including Washington and California, have successfully expanded SNAP eligibility for immigrants and refugees. Food for All Oregonians (SB 611) builds on these models, incorporating community-driven navigator programs to ensure trust and accessibility.

At South Coast Health Equity Coalition, we firmly believe that no one in Oregon should have to choose between paying their bills or putting food on the table. This is a racial, economic, and health equity issue—and passing SB 611 is a necessary step toward a just and thriving Oregon.

We urge you to vote YES on SB 611 and ensure that all Oregonians—regardless of immigration status—have access to the food they need to live, work, and thrive. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to health equity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayden Ruff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jayden Ruff (she/her)
Director, South Coast Equity Coalition
Southcoastequity.org