

Senators and Representatives,

My name is Mary Carman, and I am a constituent living in District 19, represented by Senator Wagner. Though I was not born in Oregon, I long considered myself something of a native Oregonian because I arrived when I was just shy of three months old and lived here permanently till 2010, when I moved out of state. When I finally returned in 2020, I was glad to be back home and anticipate living here for the remainder of my life.

As a child growing up in what is now Senator Campos's district 18, I learned that I had schoolmates whose families were unable to pay for their meals. I was shocked that this was the case in a place where we had so much abundance. I'm so frustrated that I can't go back in time 34 years and tell seven year-old Mary that things not only didn't improve, they got worse.

SB 611, Food for All Oregonians should be a non-negotiable for all senators and representatives across the state. This should be a top priority and sponsored by everyone, and I firmly believe that this isn't a financial issue as I've heard for the past two years. Finding the money to support it is the easy part - we're only asking for 2% of the rainy day fund - but acknowledging that we have tens of thousands of Oregonians who are unable to receive financial aid through programs like SNAP and WIC because of their immigration status, facing the fact that our society has let them down, those are the difficult parts. We have to admit that we let them go hungry. I don't want to be here again asking for money to provide the most basic necessity to my fellow immigrants. And for as much as I love my job, I don't even really want to work in food banking because it is an economic, social, and health indicator that we are doing poorly.

As a liaison between OFB and more than 55 of its partner sites in the Portland Metro area, here are the facts and figures I can give you: we saw a 31% increase in statewide pantry visits between FY23 and FY24. Despite the fact that we are distributing more food than we ever have in the history of our organization, we are also faced with the reality that we are seeing food insecurity - let's call it what it is, desperate hunger - grow at an alarming rate that is only eclipsed by the Great Depression. I have met dozens of clients at my food pantries, meal sites, colleges, and shelter programs, and I know the only way to support them in the ways they need are through programs like SNAP, so they have autonomy and dignity of choice, so they can seek out culturally relevant foods, and so they can put nearly 100% of each dollar spent back into the local economy.

If you do not pass SB 611, it tells me and all other Oregonians, that a certain amount of childhood and elder hunger is acceptable in our state. I cannot imagine a larger emergency, and we cannot continually stock up our reserves for things that might happen in the future because the food insecurity is now.

Thank you.