

When I was a young grade schooler, I learned from a conversation with my mother that there were families in my school district who couldn't afford school meal prices, and that for some of them, those school meals were the only ones they ate through the day. I was young and didn't understand but was also shocked to know I lived in a country that had so much and still let fellow children go to sleep hungry. It wasn't until I was an adult that I was able to get a post-baccalaureate degree and undergraduate certificate in Food in Culture & Social Justice from Oregon State University and begin my career in food banking. Since my time taking classes about food systems, food sovereignty, and furthering my knowledge of food apartheid and justice, I have been fighting fiercely alongside my immigrant colleagues, neighbors, and community members. An immigrant myself, I have experienced racism, microaggressions, and being passed over because I don't look like the white majority. Although I have not lived with food insecurity, I work on a daily basis with Oregon Food Bank's partner food sites and our clients. Across the state last fiscal year, our food sites saw an increase of 31% in client visits, and although we are distributing the most food we've ever been able to move through our warehouse in the history of our organization, it's not enough. My partner agency coordinators often ask what they're supposed to do when they run out of food, how they're supposed to provide for the growing and overwhelming need across their communities. I give them the same answer every time: feeding people is a very small band-aid and the best way to serve and support our neighbors is through legislative and policy change. We know, after years of research, data, and evidentiary support, that when people are empowered to purchase their own food - food that is culturally relevant, fits dietary needs, and works for households of every makeup imaginable - they are better fed. Increasing availability to state and federally funded programs means they have the autonomy and ability to make their own decisions and shop where they feel most comfortable. We're facing the worst food insecurity crisis since the Great Depression and have never seen greater need since the inception of community food support in the 1960s, begun by the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast Program. Imagine if you were to walk into your local major retailer and be handed a box of food that ended up not working for your household. Or needing to visit multiple grocery stores in one day just to make sure your family would be fed for one week. Imagine having to cobble together meals with shelf stable items you've never seen before or tried, trying to convince your children that these unrecognizable foods are nutritious and good tasting. Imagine spending your one day off standing in line for several hours to get something to eat. The reality is that, although we have excellent partner food sites across the state, the fact we're even able to serve as many as we can is a stain on Oregon. It proves a lack of support, community, and a furthering of systemic oppressions that keep our wealthy, white citizens better resourced than everyone else. In a conference I attended some years ago, I heard someone say, "Hungry people are desperate people," and that has stayed with me as I have worked at two major regional food banks and sat on the board of directors of nonprofits whose chief goals are to localize food. I have

seen the desperation firsthand. We cannot sit idly by and house and educate our most vulnerable populations and then turn around and not feed them. It's unconscionable. I strongly urge you as a constituent and someone deeply entrenched in the fight to pass Food for All Oregonians. This is an important piece of legislation that ensures our most vulnerable populations - immigrant children and elders - receive SNAP benefits regardless of their immigration status. Immigrants are at the highest risk they've been in many decades at the federal level, and Oregon needs to rise up and throw their support behind them.