

February 23, 2025 TO: Senate Committee on Human Services SUBJECT: Yes on SB 611 Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee, My name is Jim Mauceri and I live in Beaverton, Oregon. I am writing today to urge passage of SB 611 - Food For All Oregonians. While I have thankfully never personally experienced food insecurity, my perspective on this legislation is informed by several factors: 1) I have been volunteering at Lift UP, a small food security nonprofit serving Downtown and NW Portland, for three years. I serve as Chair of the Development Committee, and also as a member of the Board of Directors; 2) I have been employed at Latino Network, a nonprofit social service organization serving the Portland metro area, for 3.5 years, and my current role is that of Development Project Manager; 3) I have volunteered at the Oregon Food Bank off and on for several years; and 4) I spent several months in 2013 and 2014 volunteering at a tiny food pantry at the Portland Vineyard Church while temporarily unemployed. This last experience at the local food pantry was particularly moving. There I was able to interact closely with people in need, hearing their stories and identifying with their emotions. I came to understand the nature, to some extent, of the problems of hunger and poverty facing our society. It became clear to me that many of us could be in this same situation, were it not for some good luck and circumstances. Most importantly I saw these people in need with compassion. They are our neighbors, with hopes, dreams, and families. Oregon is facing a hunger crisis, and it is getting worse. Today, 1 in 6 children in Oregon don't have enough to eat, and one-third more Oregonians face hunger than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Food pantries across the state are confronting record-breaking levels of demand— the Oregon Food Bank has never seen this level of urgent need in its 40+ years of food banking. At Lift UP, where I volunteer, we have experienced a nearly 60% increase in service needs in the past three years alone. Despite paying billions in annual taxes in Oregon, immigrant Oregonians are twice as likely to face hunger and poverty in our state. Thousands of immigrant and refugee Oregonians are excluded from vital food assistance due to their immigration status. These are our neighbors, our family, our friends, the children our kids play with, our coworkers and their loved ones— the people who help make Oregon a beautiful place to live. Access to food should not depend on where we were born. I urge you to envision an Oregon where anyone who needs food can get it. Food for All Oregonians (SB 611) will allow low-income Youth and Elder Oregonians to access the grocery benefits they need to thrive. These are Youth and Elders who are currently excluded from SNAP solely due to immigration status. Food for All will build on successful, community-driven navigator models to ensure trust and community safety. I have witnessed the success of these community-driven models at Latino Network, with programs like Oregon Worker Relief, and Universal Representation. Simply put, they work and are the appropriate vehicle to deliver food security to Oregonians in need. We know that when we all have access to food, we're all better off. Kids do better in school, our families' health and well-being improves, and our economy thrives through the support of local businesses. This is true in every corner of

Oregon—in rural, urban, and suburban communities alike. When all of our neighbors are getting the food that they need, all of Oregon thrives. You have no doubt been informed of the many benefits of a food-secure population, but they are worth repeating:

- Homelessness and Housing Stability – a huge and timely issue. More than 50 percent of Oregonian renters lack sufficient residual income to pay for both rent AND basic necessities, such as food and medicine. The housing crisis cannot be addressed in a vacuum; food security is a critical part of the solution.
- Education and Early Learning: The importance of nutrition in education and early learning cannot be understated. The benefits include profound positive effects on the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. Further, children who face food insecurity at home are more likely to experience chronic school absenteeism and face a higher risk of dropping out. Another study found that students experiencing resource scarcity performed worse on the SAT, impacting their ability to attend college and their lifetime wages. Increasing access to SNAP to ensure that fewer children in Oregon grow up hungry is an investment in Oregon's future.
- Health Equity: For many low-income individuals, SNAP is vital for meeting basic nutritional needs and is therefore foundational to overall health and well-being. Food insecurity has long been linked to a wide variety of health conditions. By improving dietary intake, SNAP contributes to early intervention and prevention of health issues, improves the ability to manage health conditions and reduces health care costs. People who lack consistent access to adequate food spend roughly 45 percent more on medical care. According to a study of older adults dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid, SNAP participation was associated with reduced hospitalization, and among those who were hospitalized, less costly hospital stays.
- Behavioral Health: SNAP also provides invaluable benefits for behavioral health outcomes. SNAP leads to decreased rates of major depressive episodes, mental illness and suicidal ideation. Financial strain and uncertainty about having enough food – especially in times of crisis or instability – creates and exacerbates psychological distress that leads to compounding effects on behavioral health. Similar to the Homelessness, the Mental Health Crisis in our society cannot be addressed in a vacuum; food security is part of the solution. My experiences have informed my belief that no one should be denied food assistance simply because of:

- Where someone was born. In Oregon, over 60,000 people are ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status. This includes people who are Legal Permanent Residents but who have yet to clear the "5-year bar," DACA recipients, people in the process of applying for asylum, Oregonians who are undocumented, and people with Temporary Protected Status.
- Whether someone is attending college. Currently, many full-time college students are categorically ineligible for SNAP. This exclusion is based on outdated assumptions about who attends college. We see large number of PSU students accessing our food pantry at Lift UP.
- Whether someone struggles to find full-time work.
- Whether someone lives on land designated as a Reservation.
- Whether someone earns just "too much" to qualify for SNAP, but still struggles to afford food.

Oregon should be leading the way with progressive, humane legislation aimed at ending food insecurity. FOOD IS A HUMAN RIGHT. We should join

Washington, California and other states who have state-funded programs to improve SNAP eligibility for immigrants and refugees. The people who are currently excluded include Oregonians who are essential to sustaining food production, childcare, healthcare institutions, education, transportation and other critical services throughout the state. These are our neighbors and they deserve food security. This is why I am urging your YES vote on SB 611. Thank you for your time and consideration. Sincerely, Jim Mauceri
Beaverton, Oregon