

Submitter: Pat Christiansen
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB611
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 Pat Christiansen and I live in Beaverton. I am an active member of St. Andrew Lutheran Church. We have helped families who have arrived in Oregon after fleeing from impossible conditions in Afghanistan and Syria. As a member of our faith community and as a member of the Sacred Organizing Coalition, I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 611, Food For All Oregonians which would ensure Youth and Elder Oregonians, regardless of immigration status, have access to the food they need to keep them and their families healthy.

Immigrants face myriad challenges when they arrive in this country. Language barriers, culture shock, financial pressures all come down on them at once. As a sanctuary state, we have a responsibility to do what we can to help people become contributing members of our society. But this issue isn't just about immigrants.

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.

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.

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.

This is why I am urging your YES vote on SB 611. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Pat Christiansen
Beaverton, Oregon