



To: Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Anthony Castaneda, SEIU 503

Date: 3/25/25

RE: SEIU 503 in support of SB 611

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

My name is Anthony Castaneda, I am writing on behalf of SEIU 503 in support of SB 611 Food for All Oregonians. Hunger and poverty continue to affect many Oregonian households, and it is critical that legislators allocate the resources needed to ensure that no one goes to bed hungry in our state, especially those historically left out due to immigration status.

SEIU 503 has long stood behind policies that protect the most vulnerable in our society, including advocating for food assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. We understand that access to adequate nutrition is essential for all people, regardless of their age, income level, employment status, or immigration status.

In addition to advocating for programs like SNAP and WIC, SEIU 503 along with labor partners has also been at the forefront of campaigns that push for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. We recognize that raising wages is one of the most effective ways to reduce food insecurity, but until that goal is fully realized, we must ensure that food assistance programs are accessible, robust, and equitable.

While the state has seen economic growth in certain sectors, far too many Oregonians are still struggling to make ends meet, especially those without access to essential programs due to immigration status. 12.6% of Oregonians live below the federal poverty line, including 1 in 5 children.

Hunger is especially prevalent in certain areas of the state, where food insecurity rates are higher than the state average. For example, rural counties such as Malheur, Coos, and Lake counties report food insecurity rates of over 20%—well above the state average. These areas face unique challenges, including limited access to grocery stores, higher unemployment rates, and fewer resources for families struggling to get by.

While the need for food assistance is urgent, it is important to recognize that investing in these programs yields substantial economic benefits for our state. According to the USDA, for every \$1 spent on SNAP, there is an economic return of \$1.79. This stimulates local economies by creating demand for food, which in turn supports local businesses, grocery stores, farmers, and food producers. During times of economic uncertainty, the expansion of food assistance becomes an especially powerful economic tool, quickly injecting money into local economies.

Moreover, food assistance programs not only provide immediate relief to families but also improve public health outcomes and lead to better educational outcomes, particularly for children. Children who have access to adequate nutrition are more likely to succeed in school and grow into healthy young adults. This investment in our children's future is an investment in the state's workforce and overall economic success.

In summary, the expansion of food assistance programs would provide immediate relief to families, especially children, while also generating significant economic returns that benefit our state. By ensuring access to food for all Oregonians, we are investing in the health, well-being, and future productivity of our neighbors. Please vote "aye" on SB 611 Food for All Oregonians.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Anthony Castaneda