

Submitter: Mary Ann Barham
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB611

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mary Ann Barham and I live in Multnomah County. I am a congregant at First Unitarian Church of Portland and an organizer with the Sacred Organizing Coalition. I am retired and during the past eight years I have volunteered at an organization in Washington County that offers support for community members living in poverty. Most of the people looking for support were immigrants from Mexico and Central America and may not be eligible for federal food programs. The organization offered multiple types of support, but the one that was used the most frequently was our food pantry. Access to food, especially for youth and seniors, is essential for the well-being of my community and people about whom I care. 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.

In addition to seeing the impact of food scarcity currently on my community, I remember my parents struggling to feed our family of eleven on a teacher's salary. Scrambled eggs at breakfast often included bread crusts to expand the meal or the fact after school we were only allowed to eat toast since my siblings and I could easily eat an entire loaf of bread.

Please feel free to use any of the messages below you find most compelling:

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,

Mary Ann Barham
Portland, Oregon