

**Oregon Legislative Assembly**  
**Senate Committee on Human Services**  
**900 Court Street NE Salem, OR 97301**

**March 25, 2025**

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

My name is Brent Blackwell and I am the Community Services Manager for Esther's Pantry which is part of Cascade AIDS Project (CAP) – the oldest and largest community-based provider of HIV services, education, and advocacy in Oregon. I am a 7<sup>th</sup> generation Oregonian whose family founded the town of Riddle. I have very deep roots in this state and am a proud resident, this is why I'm here! I am here to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 611.

For many years, access to our pantry was reserved for individuals living with HIV. During the pandemic, we opened our pantry up to everyone in the community. Overnight, we went from providing 100 boxes of food per month to 40 boxes of food per *day*, a need which continues to grow monthly. This gave me invaluable insight into the ways in which food insecurity impacts our state's immigrant communities.

At the request of Clackamas County, we spent two years marketing toward Ukrainian and Russian immigrants because we were able to identify that was the largest underserved group in our area. Just last week, we had a new elderly couple from Ukraine arrive at our food bank. The couple left Ukraine with just one suitcase and pennies in their bank account. While we were able to provide food for their immediate needs, relying on donations from the community to provide food for hungry families is not sustainable and we must do more.

SB 611 will allow Oregonians whose immigration status prevents them from qualifying for SNAP to still be able to gain access to nutrition and culturally familiar foods. It will also help them put much of that money back into their local economy as many of them have shared how much they love to shop locally. It would ease demand on food banks (who rely on donations from the community) and allow these families to have agency over their own health and well-being.

No person should ever have to choose between paying their bills or putting food on the table regardless of their immigration status. Food is a human right. Our freedom, our health, and our ability to thrive all depend on it. On behalf of CAP, I urge your support for Senate Bill 611.

Sincerely,

Brent Blackwell

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