

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

My name is Elena Barreto, and I am the Senior Early Childhood Policy Advisor with the Children's Institute.

Access to nutritious food is essential for early childhood development.

Proactive investments in early childhood supports, including SB 611, can break cycles of poverty and ensure long-term stability for children and families across the state. When we prioritize children, we improve lives and reduce crisis-driven spending.

Ensuring children are well-nourished during early childhood is one of the most impactful ways to build a strong foundation for their future.

With 90% of a child's brain developing by age 5, this period is critical for cognitive, physical, and emotional growth. Studies show that even marginal food insecurity is linked to behavioral, academic, and emotional challenges from infancy to adolescence. It is also associated with costly health conditions, including stress, malnutrition, diabetes, and hypertension. **Food for All ensures fewer children in Oregon grow up hungry, making it a valuable investment in our state's future.**

Food for All is a smart investment, and it's the right thing to do. **Every child has the right to thrive, and all families—regardless of background or income—need and deserve support in raising their children.** We do not need a personal connection to a child to understand that the decisions we make now will have a lasting impact on their lives. We are collectively responsible for creating and sustaining an environment that supports children and their families' safety and well-being. Food security is fundamental to creating safe and healthy communities where children can thrive.

We urge you to support the Food for All to prioritize the well-being of our children and families. Thank you for your time and for standing with all Oregonians.