

Date: 3/11/25

Name: Deirdre

Organization (if applicable): Pearl Buck Center

Location: Eugene, Oregon

Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Pearl Buck Center, we strongly support increased funding through the Oregon Hunger Response Fund to provide critical food assistance throughout the state. As an organization dedicated to supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, along with their families, we see firsthand how food insecurity affects some of our community's most vulnerable members. Food banks like Food for Lane County serve as a lifeline, ensuring that no one is left behind.

As we have seen over the past few years, the need for food assistance has only increased, along with the cost of purchasing food. One-third more Oregonians are experiencing hunger now than before the pandemic. Last year, there were 2.5 million visits to the 1,200 food assistance sites through the Oregon Food Bank Network—a 31% increase from the previous year. This ongoing hunger crisis demands immediate action, and this legislative session presents an opportunity to make meaningful change.

In our community, many of the individuals and families we serve rely on food banks to meet their basic nutritional needs. Whether it's the parents in our Family Support Program working to build a better future or the adults with disabilities in our vocational programs striving for independence, access to consistent, nutritious food is essential for their success. Food insecurity is a direct barrier to health, education, and economic stability, and we need sustained funding to ensure these critical resources remain available.

To continue supporting our community through food assistance operations and partnerships with local pantries, meal sites, and shelters, additional funding is essential. In a recent survey among Oregon's regional food programs, a \$15 million gap was identified just to maintain existing services. Without increased funding, families, individuals with disabilities, and countless Oregonians will be at greater risk of hunger.

With many of our neighbors' one paycheck away from crisis, food banks are often the only place they can turn for help. The funding requested today will directly support food distribution, operational costs, and programs that address specific community needs. We urge you to recognize the vital work that food banks do and the critical role they play in sustaining the health and well-being of Oregonians. Increased funding is not just a response to a crisis; it is an investment in Oregon's future—a future where no one goes hungry.

Thank you for your time and consideration.