

TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Senior Manager of Public Policy
RE: Oregon Food Bank's 2025 Budget Priorities
DATE: April 25, 2025



Oregon Needs Bold Investments to Meet this Moment

Co-Chairs Sanchez, Lieber, Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and Members of the Committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes... *because no one should go hungry*. Hunger is at crisis levels in Oregon. Last year alone, we saw 2.5 million visits to 1,200 food assistance sites through our Network – a staggering 31% increase from the previous year. One in eight people and one in six children in our state live in households that struggle to afford food. The rising cost of food and housing is forcing families to make impossible choices between keeping a roof over their heads and putting food on the table.

Our job is now made even more challenging because of choices happening at the federal level. Since January, changes at the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) at USDA alone have resulted in:

- **The cancellation of 90 truckloads of food intended to be distributed to Oregonians struggling to afford food, scheduled to arrive in Oregon this year.** In the second half of 2024, this stream of food accounted for 18% of the food distributed to our network;
- **The termination of the Local Food for Schools and Child Care program (LFSCC),** ending federal-state partnerships that have been instrumental in addressing childhood poverty;
- **The ending of the Local Food Purchasing Agreement.** In Oregon, this has funded over \$6 million in food purchasing dollars to 268 producers across 19 counties throughout the state to provide fresh, local foods to underserved communities.

At a time when food costs are high and hunger is on the rise, now is the time for federal and state governments to expand their existing partnerships that provide food to those in need. Unfortunately, the current Administration has chosen to cut these partnerships and leave many families with fewer resources.

Budgets are moral documents. There is perhaps no more important expression of the values of our state than our state budgets. At a time when hunger is on the rise in Oregon and we face an uncertain future at the federal level, **we are looking to the Legislature to show strong and steady**

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leadership in this time of crisis, especially our state budget. That steadiness means supporting essential services, and continuing to make strategic investments. This is how Oregon should stand up for its values in this moment: by standing strong for everyone in our communities.

Oregon Food Bank knows that food banking alone will never end hunger. That's why we support strong investments in Human Services programs at this critical time. We would like to highlight a few of our priorities:

Oregon Food Bank's Top Priority in 2025: Food for All Oregonians (SB 611-1 | \$7.7m)

Oregon Food Bank's top priority in the 2025 Session is ensuring that all Oregonians have access to food, and that immigrants in Oregon - who contribute over \$5 billion in taxes in Oregon every year¹ - are not excluded from being able to feed themselves or their family. Food For All Oregonians (SB 611-1) builds on the success of the SNAP program and would use state funding to extend the benefits of SNAP to young children (ages 6 and younger) who would be eligible for SNAP but for immigration status. Expanding food assistance to children will only have compounding effects towards a more resilient and stronger future for Oregon. It is absolutely essential for young kids to have enough food while they are still developing their physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive functions. Five other states, including Washington and California, have such state investments. Food for All Oregonians is endorsed by over 190 organizations and businesses statewide.

School Meals for All (HB 3435 | \$5m)

No student in Oregon should go hungry at school, no matter where they live or how much money their family makes. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of students remain in schools with stratified meal systems, particularly in rural areas where hunger is disproportionately high. Food is just as essential to academic success as school buses and textbooks, essentials for which schools do not ask families to cover as out-of-pocket expenses. HB 3435 passed unanimously out of the House Education Committee, and we urge you to pass this important piece of legislation so that every child in Oregon has the food they need to thrive.

The Oregon Hunger Response Fund (SB 5526 | \$6.4m base + \$5m one-time funding)

The Oregon Hunger Response Fund (OHRF) is a lifeline for Oregon's communities. It supports the 20 Regional Food Banks, supplying 1,200+ food distribution partners and programs in Oregon, with procurement and distribution of fresh, locally sourced produce, dairy, protein, and pantry staples – ensuring that nutritious and culturally relevant food reaches families in need. For decades, this investment has enabled our Network to sustain essential infrastructure, transportation, staffing, and volunteer coordination, allowing food banks across the state to meet the growing demand. We know that food banks can stretch a dollar much further than

¹ <https://data.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/map-the-impact/>



individual donations, leveraging partnerships with farmers, ranchers, and grocers to maximize every state dollar. For every \$10 invested, our Network can provide up to 30 meals, keeping food local and supporting Oregon's economy in the process.

We are requesting \$11.4m to help maintain funding for emergency food distribution statewide. This includes the Governor's recommended \$6.4m for OHRF in SB 5622, plus a one-time additional investment of \$5m. We know that the need for food assistance continues to grow, and the Regional Food Bank Network is already feeling the effects of the disruptions to USDA food distributions.

Immigrant Justice Package

Immigrants make Oregon stronger. Yet decisions by the federal Administration are causing chaos, fear, and cruelty. Oregon's legislature must rise to this moment to prioritize proven, cost-effective solutions to support farmworkers, caregivers, and others who are the backbone of Oregon's economy.

- **Food for All Oregonians** (SB 611-1 | \$7.7m): *see above*.
- **Farmworker Disaster Relief** (HB 3193 | \$10m): Keep farmworkers safe by providing temporary financial relief to farmworkers who lose work or wages due to a qualifying disaster, such as wildfires or freezing snowstorms.
- **Indigenous Language Justice** (HB 2976 | \$1.5m): Ensures Indigenous language speakers can access qualified interpreters, especially in critical times of need, such as in hospitals or court.
- **Universal Representation** (\$15m): Keep families together by ensuring they can access the highly effective and widely utilized Universal Representation program that provides Oregonians with legal representation in immigration proceedings.
- **Home Fund** (\$14m): Prevent eviction and homelessness by providing emergency rent assistance to immigrant Oregonians who are often excluded from traditional housing assistance programs.

Housing for All

Everyone deserves a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home. Yet, there is a continued lack of safe, stable, and affordable housing, which remains one of the leading drivers of hunger and poverty throughout our state. Roughly 138,000 renter households in Oregon (or 22 percent) have extremely low incomes, with a household total income at or below the federal poverty line, or 30 percent of their area median income (AMI). Similarly, Oregon also has a shortage of over 100,000 rental homes that are affordable and available for households with extremely low incomes. Accordingly, the following investments are critical for the Legislature to make in order to address our ongoing housing crisis and, by extension, food insecurity in Oregon:



- **Emergency rent assistance.** \$109m should be the minimum amount of rent assistance necessary to prevent evictions over the next two years.
- **Homelessness prevention services.** \$63.2m to support housing navigation services, landlord-tenant education and outreach, legal services, tenant supports, eviction prevention, tenant advocacy, and rapid rehousing services.
- **Home Fund.** \$14m to provide short-term rental assistance and prevent housing insecurity among Oregon's immigrant communities.
- **Creation of new affordable housing.** (POP 515 | \$700m) for LIFT rental housing. Oregon has a shortage of over 100,000 units of truly affordable rental housing. The Legislature must continue to make investments to fill this need.
- **Preservation of existing affordable housing.** (POP 519 | \$161.4m). While the state must continue to focus on housing production, it cannot forget the need to preserve existing affordable housing. Preservation of existing affordable housing is cost-effective, and provides ongoing stability for residents that already call these communities home.

Strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit (HBs 2958, 2991)

For years, Oregon's EITC has provided a small state match to the federal EITC ranging from 9–12 percent to support families that are most-at risk of having to choose between putting food on the table or paying for housing. Because this credit is so well-suited to serving both households with the lowest incomes and households with children, it is highly deserving of an expansion. HB 2958 would do just this by [1] expanding the state match of the federal EITC to 20–25 percent and [2] allowing the availability of Oregon's EITC to people under the age of 25 and ages 65 and over.

Free tax help also makes an enormous difference for working families. Oregon's Tax Infrastructure Grant has been a proven program to navigate households through tax season and to maximize valuable credits that they are eligible to receive but otherwise would not claim, such as the Oregon Kids Credit, the EITC, and others. The Legislature should increase its investment in Oregon's TIG program by passing HB 2991 to \$5m.

Community Resilience Hubs & Networks (HB 3170 | \$10m)

Strengthen Oregon's resilience to disasters and extreme weather. A Resilience Hub provides basic resources and equipment during a crisis– ranging from a physical structure to a supply site with resources such as food, water, shelter, electricity sources, and safety equipment. Resilience Networks are coordinated groups of people and entities, such as nonprofits and local governments, that help mitigate each other's gaps when responding to a community's varying needs during a disaster.



Justice Reinvestment Equity Program (HB 5005 | \$12m)

Holistically address disproportionate rates of food insecurity amongst formerly incarcerated Oregonians and survivors of harm by providing housing, victim and survivor assistance, reentry services for Oregonians returning home, diversion programs, and upstream behavioral health investments.

Double Up Food Bucks (SB 5526 | \$4.34m)

For over a decade, Double Up Food Bucks (“Double Up”) has connected SNAP participants with Oregon grown produce at Farmers Markets, CSAs, and an increasing number of grocery stores, facilitating almost \$19m in SNAP and Double Up sales since 2016. A recent economic impact assessment showed the power of Double Up to strengthen localized economies. Providing incentives helped families on tight budgets to free up funds for spending on other vital purchases like food, housing, and health care. In 2024 over \$6m in Oregon labor income was created due to the additional spending that Double Up made possible.

