

TO: Senate Committee on the Judiciary
FROM: Loren Naldoza, Public Policy Advocate
RE: YES on SB 599
DATE: March 5, 2025



Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony in support of SB 599, which would ensure that no Oregonian is denied housing on the basis of their immigration status.

Oregon Food Bank's mission is "to eliminate hunger and its root causes... because no one should be hungry." Yet one third more Oregonians experience hunger today than before the pandemic. Last year, we saw 2.5 million visits to our network of over 1,200 food assistance sites through the Oregon Food Bank Network—a 31 percent increase from the previous year.

Housing insecurity is a root cause of hunger.

As part of the State's work to end food insecurity, it must also address one of its largest underlying causes: housing instability and the cost of living. Everyone deserves a safe place to call home—and no one should have to choose between buying food and paying for housing. Yet Oregonians who are renters are three times more likely to experience food insecurity than homeowners.¹

The lack of safe, stable, and affordable housing 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).² Oregon also has a shortage of over 100,000 rental homes that are affordable and available for households with extremely low incomes. Specifically, the annual household income needed to afford a two-bedroom rental home is roughly \$62,000.³ These housing and cost-of-living crises disproportionately harm Oregon's immigrant communities,⁴ who are already barred from countless basic safety net programs and are more than twice as likely than white Oregonians to face food insecurity.

¹ Mark Edwards, Food Insecurity in Oregon: Considering the Role of Housing, Oregon State University, Nov. 2024. https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/2024-11/Oregon_Food_Insecurity_Rates_2021-2023_november_2024.pdf.

² National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Housing Needs by State, Oregon," <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/oregon>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Allison Bovell-Ammon, et al., Changes in Economic Hardships Arising During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Differences by Nativity and Race. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. Sep. 30, 2022, <https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/s10903-022-01410-z.pdf>.

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To promote access to safe, stable, and affordable housing, the Legislature must ensure that prospective tenants are not denied housing on the basis of immigration status. At a time where hunger in Oregon is at its highest in decades, housing is scarce, and the cost of living remains high, the Legislature cannot afford to bypass simple and effective solutions to reduce needless barriers to housing. SB 599 is a common-sense solution, and similar versions have been adopted by the City of Portland, as well as other jurisdictions across the country, including New York, Washington, California, and Illinois.

Oregon Food Bank urges your support of SB 599.

Sincerely,

Loren Naldoza
Public Policy Advocate
Oregon Food Bank

