

TO: Senate Committee on Housing and Development  
FROM: Leann Knapp, Oregon Food Bank  
RE: **SB 291 will help us fight hunger in Oregon**  
DATE: February 11, 2021



Chair Jama, Vice Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Leann Knapp (she/her) and I am here today representing the Oregon Food Bank. At OFB, we know that **hunger is a symptom of harmful policies and systems that create barriers for people to thrive**, and that we can only end hunger for good by tackling its root causes. That is why our mission is clear: we must act to address the inequality, racism and oppression that create serious disparities in all areas of life- including housing.

**The connections between housing, the criminal legal system, and hunger are clear.** Due to inequitable policies, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are overrepresented in Oregon's prisons and jails:

- Black individuals are 2% of Oregon's population, but 10% of those incarcerated,
- Latinx individuals are 12% of Oregon's population, but 16% of those incarcerated, and
- Indigenous people are 1% of Oregon's population but 3% of those incarcerated.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to food, 28% of Black and Latinx households reported facing hunger, compared to 12% of white households<sup>2</sup>- and that was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, we know that **housing discrimination also disproportionately affects people of color**, such as landlords showing families of color fewer rental options or keeping people with criminalized records from finding suitable housing<sup>3</sup>, which is why we are here today.

None of this a coincidence. **Systemic racism is the thread that runs through every one of our systems and structures, and it inextricably links food access, housing, and our criminal legal system.** People returning to the community after being incarcerated who had adequate housing were 60% less likely to return to prison. Yet, nearly 80% of returning individuals are housing insecure when they are released<sup>4</sup>, meaning they are also more likely to experience hunger.

Bread for the World puts it best when they say, "**When people are released [from incarceration] and return home, they need a place to live, food to eat, and a job that will enable them to pay for these and other basic necessities going forward.**" Without any one of these critical factors, the ability for an individual and their family to thrive will be significantly diminished.

That is why **Oregon Food Bank strongly urges your support for Senate Bill 291-** because by providing individual assessments to renters that will allow them a better chance at accessing housing, we are also fighting hunger.

We would like to thank Governor Brown, Oregon's Racial Justice Council, and all those who convened to craft this critical policy, and urge the swift passage of SB 291. Thank you for your time and consideration.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OR.html>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.oregonhungertaskforce.org/the-problem>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2020/10/30/492606/pandemic-exacerbated-housing-instability-renters-color/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/briefing-paper-mass-incarceration-february-2018.pdf>