

To: Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

From: Peggy Samolinski, Director, Youth and Family Services Division

Date: February 25, 2021

RE: Testimony on SB 555

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery,

I am writing in support of SB 555, which expands the “Double-Up Food Bucks” SNAP match program at local grocery stores and farmers markets. SB 555 would greatly benefit low-income households who receive SNAP benefits, a significant portion of whom are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

According to hunger experts, prior to the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure. Today, nearly 1 in 5 people in our communities face hunger — a dramatic increase. Prior to the pandemic, BIPOC communities experienced systemic inequities that contribute to significant health and economic disparities, including food insecurity. As we all know, the pandemic has only served to further illuminate and exacerbate those disparities.

At Multnomah County we see that households who have SNAP benefits face significant challenges to getting fresh, locally grown food. These challenges include living in food deserts, limited farmer’s market locations, and lack of adequate transportation to locations where “double up” opportunities exist for SNAP benefits. Further, we see in our school-based food pantries, community-based senior centers, and Free Food Markets that fresh vegetables and fruit are in high demand and allow people to prepare meals that meet both their nutritional needs and cultural preferences. During the pandemic our pantries have seen a dramatic increase in families facing food insecurity who are accessing food at these community locations.

Healthy and fresh food is foundational for not only the health of all our citizens, but particularly for our children. Food security and a healthy diet affect not only our children’s health and development, but also their academic and social-emotional success. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, the SNAP program is the nation’s most important anti-hunger program. And in Oregon, almost 52% of SNAP participants in Oregon are in families with children.

Expanding innovative programs within SNAP is an effective way to reach a significant number of our children and families who are struggling with food insecurity, as well as support BIPOC communities and promote racial and food justice.

We at Multnomah County support SB 555 and ask that you invest in this proven approach to addressing food insecurity and expanding access to nutritious food.