

# Oregon Hunger Task Force

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## *Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon*

### **Issue Brief: Immigration Policy and Food Security**

Issued June 27, 2017<sup>1</sup>

#### **Background**

The link between hunger and immigration status is well established and has long been an area of concern; immigrants, refugees, and asylees, particularly those with children, are at higher risk of food insecurity than those born in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Among young children with foreign-born mothers, the odds of food insecurity were more than three times as great as compared to young children with U.S.-born mothers (Cook, 2013). Despite higher rates of poverty and food insecurity, immigrants have disproportionately low rates of utilizing the public benefits for which they are eligible.<sup>3</sup>

In January, a draft Executive Order (EO) was leaked from the White House that could impact access to nutrition assistance<sup>4</sup>. If signed, the EO would expand the types of public benefits that may be considered in a “public charge” determination. “Public charge” is a test used for certain immigrants when they seek to enter the country or get a Green Card. In extremely rare circumstances, it can make individuals deportable if they become a “public charge” during their first five years after entry. Although the EO has not been finalized or filed, the impact is plain: it discourages access to “federal means-tested public benefits” by immigrants.

The response to the leaked Executive Order in immigrant communities has been swift. Members of the Oregon Hunger Task Force are hearing reports from communities across the state of decreased attendance by children at school and missing meals; of families disenrolling from SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC); of parents afraid to leave home even to purchase groceries, or seek help at their local food pantry.

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<sup>1</sup> Task Force members representing state agencies abstained from voting on this issue brief: DHS, WIC, OR Dairy & Nutrition Council, OSU Extension, ODE

<sup>2</sup> “Food Insecurity among Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylees” Children’s Health Watch, FRAC, February 2016, [http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/5118/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content\\_item\\_KEY=13089](http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/5118/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content_item_KEY=13089)

<sup>3</sup> “Low Income Immigrant Families Access to SNAP and TANF”, November, 2014, <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/low-income-immigrant-families-access-snap-and-tanf>

<sup>4</sup> “Trump’s Executive Orders and Immigrants’ Access to Health, Food, and Other Public Programs: Things to Keep in Mind When Talking with Immigrants”, National Immigrant Law Center website, March 22, 2017, <https://www.nilc.org/issues/health-care/exec-orders-and-access-to-public-programs/>

It has become clear that the leaked EO, and the political environment surrounding immigration, is having a direct and negative impact on the food security of Oregon's communities. The Oregon Hunger Task Force returns to the statement that grounds our state in its approach to food security: "All persons have the right to be free from hunger."<sup>5</sup> We are encouraged that our state's foundational values do not exclude non-citizens from this basic human right.

Below, we outline three areas of concern in the context of this environment: **Immigrants' Access to Emergency Food, Utilization of Public Benefits**, and the **Impact on Oregon's Economy**. We also issue recommendations for addressing food insecurity within each of these areas of concern for community, local government, and state government leaders.

## **Areas of Concern**

### **1. Immigrants' Access to Emergency Food**

The Oregon Food Bank reports local food pantries seeing a decrease in immigrant populations utilizing emergency food services. Additionally, confusion persists within immigrant communities of whether emergency food services are government services; clients and workers alike report fearing that pantry client data will be utilized by the government.

The arrest and detention by ICE of an Oregon Food Bank-affiliated school pantry coordinator and DACA 'Dreamer', Francisco J. Rodriguez Dominguez, was a highly publicized<sup>6</sup> event in March of 2017. To counter escalating fears by those seeking food assistance, OFB publicly reaffirmed<sup>7</sup>, "At Oregon Food Bank, we care about one thing above all – that you are nourished... We welcome you – no matter who you love, what you think, what you look like, what your gender is, what you believe, what your citizenship status is."

In response to a reported drop in clients, some local pantries have posted signs in their facilities, written articles, and sent letters to their client base clarifying that it is possible to receive food assistance anonymously. Many organizations have sought bilingual volunteers for translation services during pantry hours. Others have provided "Know Your Rights" trainings. Some emergency food organizations have made a special effort to expand their mobile pantry services.

### **Recommendations:**

- Strengthen the Oregon Hunger Response Fund, which provides support to food banks and pantries across the state
- Encourage local food banks and pantries to adopt practices that will allow clients safe access to emergency food assistance, such as

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<sup>5</sup> ORS "Policy on hunger" 458.530 § (2)(b) (1989) (amended in 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Sutton, Joe; Sterling, Joe; Ansari, Azadeh; and Flores, Rosa. "Portland 'Dreamer' released on bond after being arrested by ICE agents." CNN, March 28, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/27/us/portland-dreamer-ice-arrest/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> "Oregon Food Bank responded to ICE arrest of pantry manager", Oregon Food Bank website, March 27, 2017, <https://www.oregonfoodbank.org/oregon-food-bank-responds-ice-arrest-pantry-manager>.

- Recruiting bilingual and bicultural volunteers to ensure that food pantry services are welcoming and culturally appropriate and that information is accurately shared
- Offering access to emergency food anonymously or without a stated legal status
- Expanding of mobile emergency food services
- Clear communication to clients of pantry policies in provision of services and in protecting client data
- Protect social service and public assistance buildings as “Sensitive Locations” for the purposes of federal immigration enforcement.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Utilization of Public Benefits**

According to a 2014 report by the [Urban Institute](#) 24 percent of kids through age 17 (*about 18 million nationwide*) were living in families with one or more foreign-born parents<sup>9</sup>. This report highlights that although children with foreign-born parents are “overrepresented among poor families, they are underrepresented in public benefits enrollment.”. With the draft Executive Order and increased concern about the impact of public benefit usage on immigration policy, this disparity appears to be increasing.

Oregon public benefit offices and officials are noting that people are visiting offices in person to drop off Electronic Benefit Transfer cards and disenroll from programs. Others are simply stopping their use of benefits, possibly hoping they will eventually “drop off the list” of participants. Missed WIC nutrition counseling appointments are becoming more frequent, there has been a shift from seniors accessing congregate meal sites to requesting home delivered meals and SNAP-Ed classes have reported a decrease in some communities. School nutrition officials have noticed that some families are disenrolling from free and reduced price school meals.

Caution among advocates and benefit providers in issuing guidance is prevalent due to the uncertainty about future policy changes. However, officials in the Department of Human Services, the Oregon Department of Education, and Oregon Health Authority are developing guidance for frontline workers advising people concerned about utilizing public food benefits due to immigration status. Some programs have also added clarification on their application regarding eligibility and confidentiality.

### **Recommendations:**

- Immigration lawyers in Oregon and those conducting program outreach should have access to accurate information regarding current policy on public benefit eligibility.
- Public benefit offices and workers should receive and follow guidance as provided by state agencies. (*Public statements and guidance will be included here when available.*)

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<sup>8</sup> Matsumoto, Samantha. “Bill seeks to ban federal immigration agents from courthouses, other sensitive locations”, Oregon Live, March 31, 2017, [http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/03/bill\\_seeks\\_to\\_ban\\_federal\\_immi.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/03/bill_seeks_to_ban_federal_immi.html).

<sup>9</sup> Hanson, Devlin; Koball, Heather; Fortuny, Karina; Chaudry, Ajay. “Low-income Immigrant Families’ Access to SNAP and TANF” Urban Institute: November 12, 2014. <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/low-income-immigrant-families-access-snap-and-tanf>

- OHA 7206, [Oregon Health Authority Updated Statement on Access to Health Services for Oregon Residents](#), March 2017.
- Social service providers should refer individuals disenrolling from public programs to local and trusted food pantries and other community resources.
- Institute a state-funded program that provides nutrition assistance to immigrants who are not eligible for coverage under the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as is currently in place in California and Washington.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Impact on Oregon's Economy**

Oregon's agricultural sector was already experiencing labor shortages prior to the recent political context<sup>11</sup>. National estimates state that 46 percent of agricultural jobs are held by immigrants without legal status. A swift reduction in the labor force would likely result in huge crop losses due to a lack of labor and increased food prices.

Simultaneously, as families relinquish access to public assistance programs out of fear, they are also being harmed by the loss of income either due to the deportation of wage-earning family members or due to fear of leaving the house to work. This will decrease the funds families have to purchase food and could harm the strength of the local economy and food system. Similarly, as families disenroll from public benefit programs such as SNAP and WIC, local farmers, food producers, and grocers suffer from decreased community purchasing power for food.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Immigrant community members, service providers, and employers can share stories of the impact of policy change on food insecurity, health and economic stability with leaders, and its effect on individuals, families, and the broader community/economy.
- Implement national immigration policies to promote food security and community economic stability.
- Provide a path to legal immigration status for undocumented agricultural workers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Table 12: State Funded Food Assistance Programs" National Immigration Law Center website, August 2016, [https://www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/state\\_food/](https://www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/state_food/).

<sup>11</sup> Oliver, Gordon. "Oregon farmers scrambling as labor shortage collides with Trump immigration crackdown." The Oregonian. April 4 2017, [http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2017/04/oregon\\_farmers\\_scrambling\\_as\\_1.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2017/04/oregon_farmers_scrambling_as_1.html).

<sup>12</sup> "Farmworker Justice Statement: Rep Luis Gutierrez introduces Agricultural Worker Program Act of 2017 in House", Farmworker Justice website, May 27, 2017, <https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/press/2017/05/farmworker-justice-statement-rep-luis-gutierrez-introduces-agricultural-worker-program>.