

Oregon Hunger Task Force Statement on Hunger and Racism

June, 2020

We of the Oregon Hunger Task Force recognize the link between hunger and systemic racism. Created by the Oregon State Legislature to be a statewide advocate for Oregonians who are hungry or at risk of hunger, the Task Force stands in solidarity with those who live at the intersection between hunger and racism.

In the past few weeks, we have been vividly reminded of the systemic racism that exists in our country. With tragic results, our system treats people of color unjustly. We confront this reality with dismay and justified anger. Recent tragedies, particularly the death of George Floyd, remind us what people of color deal daily with when the videos are not running.

We stand in solidarity with those across our state who have been marginalized, in denouncing systemic injustice, particularly that which is related to race and ethnicity. Systemic injustice, as violence in slow motion, has the same tragic result as explicit violence. We are united in our resolve to advocate for transformation at every level of our system.

Of utmost concern to the Hunger Task Force is that disparities remain, particularly for households led by people of color, Black and African-Americans, Native Americans, and Latinx people. All these households experience hunger at disproportionately high rates, nearly twice the rate of the general population and two and a half times that of white households.

Racial discrimination directly affects jobs, housing, and policing and incarceration, which in turn affects quality of life, particularly in education, food supply, transportation, environmental conditions, mental health, healthcare, and even shortened life expectancy. Lived experience and multitudes of studies demonstrate a marked correlation between food insecurity and systemic racism.¹

We echo the recent statement by the UofO Food Security Task Force: Any amount of food insecurity for any Oregonian is unacceptable. Numbers that demonstrate a disproportionate impact on communities of color are an injustice. COVID-19 and the related historic wave of unemployment have been demonstrated to be impacting these same populations at a much higher level. The same structural processes that make access to food unequal – particularly systems of white supremacy – also contribute to the disproportionate impact caused by the pandemic and its economic consequences.

As the state's Hunger Task Force, we commit to the ongoing task of applying a racial equity lens first to ourselves and then to the work we have been assigned. Our advocacy begins with learning and listening, and then examining public policy and programs, and finally giving voice to the intersection between hunger and racism in order to dismantle them both.

We are once again reminded that all lives do not truly matter until Black lives matter. In our pursuit of equity and justice, we reaffirm the founding declaration of the Oregon Hunger Task Force that "All Persons Have the Right to be Free from Hunger" and recommit to work on behalf of those disproportionately denied that right.

¹ See, for example, "From Disparities to Discrimination: Getting at the Roots of Food Insecurity in America," https://www.centerforhungerfreecommunities.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2final_pa_housing_public_assist_healthcare_-_web_1.pdf.