



Testimony of Susannah Morgan, CEO, Oregon Food Bank to the United States Senate Committee on Finance

“Examining Charitable Giving and Trends in the Nonprofit Sector”

As prepared for delivery on March 17, 2022

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to share my on-the-ground perspective regarding charitable giving in the nonprofit sector.

My name is Susannah Morgan, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Oregon Food Bank. Our network is among the largest in the country, with a central warehouse that provides resources to 21 regional food banks – which then support over 1,400 pantries, free food markets and meal sites across Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Our mission is to end hunger and its root causes. To build communities that never know hunger, we need living-wage jobs, affordable housing and childcare, and protection from discrimination. When we hit tough times, we need strong government safety nets, like SNAP, to ensure everyone has access to food. Food banks should be the last resort when other systems have failed – and food alone will never solve hunger.

I have worked in anti-hunger efforts for 26 years across several states, and the past two years have been the most challenging in my career. More than 865,000 people sought emergency food assistance through the Oregon Food Bank Network in 2019 – nearly 1 in 5 of our neighbors. In 2020, this number rose like a tsunami to a jaw-dropping height of 1.7 million people, and remained painfully high at over a million in 2021.

Even with the outpouring of community support, we couldn't have kept food flowing without significant state and federal action. As we began to run out of food due to the enormous increase in demand, Governor Kate Brown came through with \$1 million a week for food purchases until USDA commodities arrived through the CARES Act. Congressional aid reached communities directly through enhanced unemployment and SNAP benefits, relief payments to families, and more. The Child Tax Credit alone drove down child poverty by an incredible 41%¹ and reduced food insecurity by 26%². Combined, these actions helped us to meet the crisis head-on and ensure that hunger did not spiral out of control.

Charitable giving incentives were an important piece of this equation as well. Let me share one extraordinary week I had, tied to decisions made by this committee: on a Monday early in the pandemic, my colleague in The Dalles, Oregon called me over the moon because she had just located the perfect building for a new regional food bank. Purchase price was \$750,000. On Wednesday, a local philanthropist expressed interest in making a \$1 million donation, thanks in part to tax law changes that allowed 100% deduction of her Adjusted Gross Income. On Friday, she committed to fund the purchase of the building, in what is surely the shortest capital campaign ever.

¹ <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-january-2022>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2788110>

The work of this committee clearly influences expressions of love and generosity in our communities. Yet, from where I sit, it is incredibly important that you consider how future tax policy changes may impact federal revenue. Even at our scale in Oregon, for every meal we provide, SNAP provides 10. Charity organizations simply cannot replace federal funding for the programs and resources our families need to thrive.

So I humbly ask that you act to strengthen federal revenue and advance policies that prevent hunger from happening. The best thing Congress can do to reduce hunger is invest in proven solutions that support families directly. Reinstating the Child Tax Credit. Modernize SNAP to reflect the true cost of healthy food. Invest in housing and child care. Raise revenue by requiring the wealthiest corporations, individuals and estates to pay what they owe.

It is important that any new incentives are designed to encourage charitable giving that helps our communities *now*. Hunger is a crisis today and charitable support is needed now — not tucked away for some hypothetical future. Sustain the 100% Adjusted Gross Income deduction. Increase the amount private foundations must grant annually. Ensure donor-advised funds held by large commercial wealth firms have minimum annual distributions of 7 to 10% and spend-down timelines, while making exceptions for community foundations.

As we speak, our communities face uncertainty around the impact of global events, the cost of living, and whether a new variant might emerge. Hunger remains an epidemic. This isn't over. We need Congress to continue supporting our neighbors through proven policies. I believe that, together, we can still emerge stronger than ever.

It has been an honor to be with you today. Thank you for your time and attention.