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Testimony of Susannah Morgan
before the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners
February 12th, 2013

Good morning Chair Cogen and Board of County Commissioners. My name is Susannah Morgan and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Oregon Food Bank (OFB).

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today about childhood hunger in Oregon and Multnomah County. I am honored to be part of this panel and want to recognize the work of the others providing testimony today as great partners and allies in the fight against hunger.

I begin by sharing some of the voices of our neighbors dealing with hunger right here in Multnomah County, captured through OFB's annual Voices project:

"We're struggling so bad", says Antonia, a certified nanny and the mother of three kids. "During the last week of most months my husband doesn't bring lunches to work, even though he should. He works such a hard job. But he won't, just so we can make sure our kids eat."

And Thomas tells us, "My sister couldn't take care of her children, so I stepped up to take care of my nieces and nephews. Kids at their ages — they're 13, 15 and 11 now — eat like you wouldn't believe. Oh my god. Everything I put in that kitchen is gone".

I could share many more stories like these. Children in Multnomah County are disproportionately impacted by hunger. In Multnomah County, children make up about 20 percent of the population, but about 34 percent of those eating emergency food from the OFB Network. This means that more than 16,000 children in Multnomah County eat from an emergency food box from the Oregon Food Bank Network in an average month.

Even as the economy has slightly improved in the last year, Oregon Food Bank continues to see families in Multnomah County struggle with lack of access to healthy food. Requests for emergency food boxes in Multnomah County have increased by about 13 percent since 2012 and increased by 43 percent since before the recession (2006-2007). OFB recently completed its Hunger Factors Assessment, a survey of food box clients. The survey's 4500 respondents from across the state and 539 in Multnomah County highlighted their struggles with food insecurity and other issues.

... because no one should be
HUNGRY

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Chronic hunger experienced by many Multnomah County households forces families to make difficult choices. 36 percent of surveyed families with children reported having to cut the size of their children's meals or have their children skip meals in the last year because there was not enough money for food.

The stories and data we hear from focus groups underline that hunger is not an isolated problem for most families. Households with children that are struggling to meet their basic food needs must also deal with unemployment, underemployment and rising costs for all essential goods and services. Nearly 40 percent of households with children in Multnomah County that OFB surveyed report incomes at or below 50 percent of the federal poverty line, which is \$11,000 a year for a family of four. In addition, out of the households surveyed, those with children are more likely to have an unemployed adult than households without children. High costs of food, gas, health care and childcare are also driving households to seek emergency food.

Hunger negatively impacts a child's academic performance, cognitive development, growth, and physical and psychological health. Without intervention, these impacts stay with children throughout their entire life. Exposure to food insecurity as a young child and even in the womb causes poor health outcomes including headaches and stomachaches, respiratory infections and nutrient deficiency. Repeated exposure appears to be particularly damaging. Hungry children have lower school achievement, increased absenteeism, impaired ability to think, poor behavior, and a higher likelihood of repeating a grade. Food insecurity experiences also influence children's social skills including self-control, attentiveness and task persistence. Finally, children at risk for food insecurity can also be at risk for obesity and chronic conditions associated with it. Yet, household food insecurity is a situation that can be identified and treated with resources such as food assistance programs and emergency food. These interventions can help prevent developmental problems in children and increases the chances that children can grow up to be productive and successful adults.

Oregon Food Bank works to address childhood hunger in multiple ways

Emergency food distribution

OFB is the hub of a statewide food distribution network made up of 20 regional food banks across the state working with more than 900 partner agencies such as food pantries and meal sites. The majority of this food is distributed in food boxes, which provide a 3-5 day supply of groceries for a family. OFB is able to reach and serve tens of thousands of children and families with this primary focus of supporting meals made at home with food parcels that feature basic staples and fresh produce. In fact, more than one third of those supported by food box distribution are children. Children do best when the whole family receives assistance – not just the child.

Here in Multnomah County, OFB - Metro Services regional food bank worked with more than 180 partner agencies in the last year to distribute 9 million pounds of food in emergency food boxes to more than 610,000 individuals and provided more than 1.4 million hot meals and 936,000 pounds to other community organizations. The largest agency in the OFB statewide network is SnowCap Community Charities in Rockwood, which serves 4000 emergency food boxes to about 10,000 people each month and has been on the receiving end of more than 46,000 pounds of fresh produce from Multnomah County's CROPS farm over the last four years.

Innovative program expansion

In addition to its continued commitment to food distribution via a network of charitable and faith-based organizations, OFB is exploring ways to build a broader network of food distribution that increases food access and serves families and children where they already travel and meet. Among other supplemental child feeding programs supported by OFB,

school-based food pantries are uniquely suited to address childhood hunger because they provide food in a setting that is already familiar to the family. This increases the likelihood that a family in need will receive assistance. These efforts integrate food assistance in schools and health care settings, providing a safe and familiar point of entry for coordinated services and shift some of the burden from faith-based and charitable organizations.

OFB is proud of its strong partnerships with Multnomah County around establishing food pantries at six SUN school sites in east county (Alder Elementary, Earl Boyles Elementary, Lynch View Elementary, Shaver Elementary, East Gresham Grade School and Kelly Elementary). Over the last two years, these pantries combined have served 500 families each month. We want to thank Multnomah County for its partnership in these endeavors and are eager to explore opportunities for program expansion over the next several years. Establishing pantries at schools opens opportunities to pair food with knowledge - providing nutrition messaging and tasting tours for children and families.

In addition, OFB works with partners in Multnomah County to provide Harvest Share sites, which are free farmers markets and Community Basket programs, which provide a predictable source of groceries to make meals and fresh fruit and vegetables (though not a complete 3-5 day supply of food). In the last year, 15 Harvest Share sites in Multnomah County distributed over 680,000 pounds of fresh produce to an average of about 1500 families each month.

OFB has also worked to engage with the health care community around establishing the health care setting as a place where families can access information and food resources. One of OFB's programs, the Childhood Hunger Coalition, is a group of health care providers and anti-hunger advocates working to engage with the health care community around hunger as a public health concern. The Childhood Hunger Coalition's work has been focused on developing resources and conducting outreach to enlist health care providers as effective messengers about child hunger as part of their daily work. Currently, the Childhood Hunger Coalition is refining and evaluating a food security screening and intervention model at OHSU's Doernbecher's Children's Hospital to develop best practices and lessons learned that can be integrated and adapted into various clinical settings. Providers at OHSU are struck by how many families are screening positive for food insecurity, which underlines the importance of implementing this type of screening in the clinical setting.

Public private partnerships

The second part of OFB's mission, to eliminate the root causes of hunger, is driven by policy advocacy, educational programming and community organizing. OFB's legislative agenda at the federal, state and local levels is focused on eliminating the root causes of hunger through protecting and strengthening food assistance programs and the social safety net as well as supporting policies that advance economic opportunity and build strong local food systems across the state. Getting at these upstream priorities helps ensure families and children are not dealing with poverty and hunger. For example, families surveyed by OFB identified employment as the number-one way that they could improve their situation and also testified to the importance of crucial services such as affordable housing, health care and affordable child care in reducing dependence on emergency food.

We believe that addressing hunger in a long-term and sustainable way requires partnerships between the public and private sectors. We appreciate the tremendous support and partnership from our public sector partners in the fight against hunger. Two of the most important federal nutrition programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the food stamp program) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) are the backbone of food assistance for many families in Multnomah County and across the state and help stimulate our local economies and bolster the emergency food system. Similarly, the state's Oregon Hunger Response Fund, provides crucial investment in the OFB statewide network by helping with food purchase and expanding capacity for storage, distribution and other programming.

Our local government partners, including Multnomah County and the city of Portland have played a strong role in addressing hunger in the county. We want to recognize Multnomah County CROPS farm as an excellent example of how

our local government partners can leverage their resources to play an important role in improving food security and access to healthy food in our communities. The county's leadership on the Multnomah Food Action Plan has allowed our community to envision a blueprint for a sustainable, prosperous and equitable food system. Oregon Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to play a key role in developing and implementing the plan and looks forward to continued partnership on this effort.

We also thank Commissioner Saltzman for his leadership on renewing the Portland Children's Levy and adding child hunger as a category for grants. If the levy is renewed, this additional funding will have a tremendous impact on our partner agencies as they work to address the increasing need for supportive services including hunger relief.

We appreciate Multnomah County's support to Oregon Food Bank over the years and we look forward to working with you to further address childhood hunger in the county.

Thank you and I'm happy to respond to questions.