



Testimony to
Ohio House Finance Committee
Health and Human Services Subcommittee

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Mary O'Shea, Greater Cleveland Food Bank

Chair Rep. Mark Romanchuk, Ranking Member Emilia Strong Sykes, Rep. Sarah LaTourette,
Rep. Michael J. O'Brien, Rep. Robert Cole Sprague

Thank you, Chair Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee for the opportunity to address you today.

I am Mary O'Shea, Director of Advocacy and Public Education for The Greater Cleveland Food Bank, where we work to ensure that everyone in our communities has the nutritious food they need every day. We are one of 12 Ohio food banks that provide food to hunger programs in every county throughout the state of Ohio. We thank you for your longstanding support of the Ohio Food Program and the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program.

These programs were first funded in the State budget 20 years ago by then Governor George Voinovich, who later served in the U.S. Senate. He had been Mayor of Cleveland and was from a devout Catholic family. His mother ran a pantry program in the Cleveland church they attended. He continued to support hunger relief as a U.S. Senator and served on the GCFB board after his retirement.

As need rose during the great recession, the Greater Cleveland Food Bank increased our efforts to get nutritious food to people in the six Northeast Ohio communities we serve. We also embarked on a strategic plan to "shorten the line" by connecting clients to services that would help them address the main drivers of food insecurity, namely, employment, health care, and housing. We created new programs, including 28 school markets, where families with children can receive bags of fresh Ohio produce at the end of a school day; and 20 markets targeted to low-income seniors. At a distribution at a senior high rise, a woman came down and was greeted by friends who asked her where she had been. She explained that she hadn't been feeling well, and that she realized she hadn't eaten in a couple of days. Remembering the food bank distribution was this day she came down to get some fresh produce to make some soup. I shudder to think what would have happened had we not been there that day; perhaps an expensive visit to an emergency room. For all of these programs, we rely heavily on the

nutritious food provided through the Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program.

We also have five “food as medicine” partnerships, which are produce distributions tailored to clients with health challenges. We are working with MetroHealth Hospital to add an on sight food pantry where vulnerable patients will be sent with a food “prescription” to receive healthy food to take home, also ensuring they are not taking medication on an empty stomach.

Our chief way of distributing state food is through more than 150 mobile pantries, where we take a truckload of fresh Ohio produce to a church or agency parking lot where people line up to receive it.

During our lobby day a couple of weeks ago, we spent time with Holthouse vegetable farmers from Willard, Ohio. They told us how much the business from the food banks has meant to them. They no longer have to plow crops under, and they employ a lot of people to plant, care for and harvest the fruits and vegetables. Last season they provided 35 truckloads of produce to food banks.

By now, you may recognize that this is an opportunity to back a winner. For 20 years, these successful programs have helped Ohio farmers and food producers as well as Ohioans who struggle to put food on the table. The programs create jobs, prevent waste, and feed hungry families.

At a produce distribution in Geauga County, I helped an elderly woman to her car with a heavy bag of produce. She was well dressed, but her car was old and the rear-view mirror was held on with duct tape. She explained to me that she needed help with food because she was paying \$400 a month for medicines she needed.

For 20 years the State of Ohio has supported these food programs because you know that we are good stewards of public dollars, good partners with farmers, and our food banks collectively provide food to more than 2 million low income Ohioans. You can be proud of that! I ask you for your support of the Comprehensive Approach to Hunger proposed by the Ohio Association of Food Banks, which will allow our food banks additional flexibility to use the dollars where they can provide the maximum benefit.

Thank you.