

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

May 28, 2019

Testimony from Lisa Hamler-Fugitt Ohio Association of Foodbanks

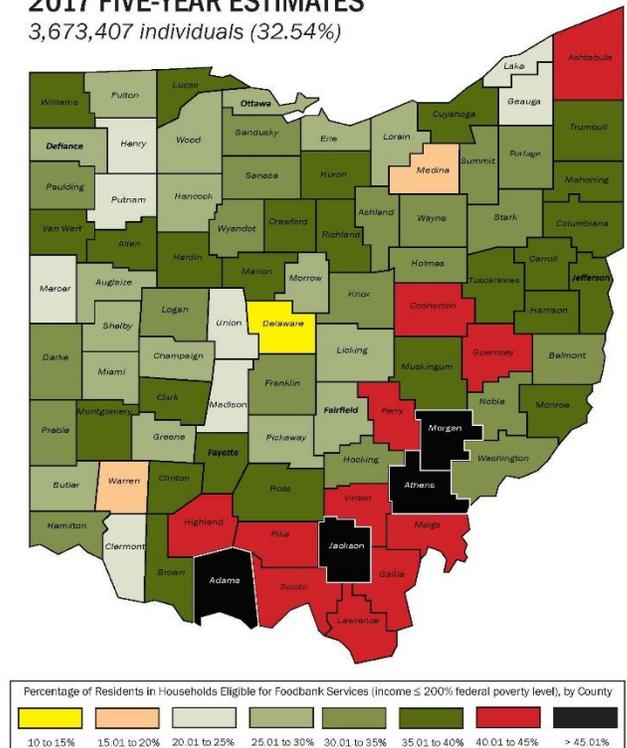
Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger.

I am very honored to be here to share with you the efforts of our 12 foodbanks, who provide food, funding, training and critical resources to more than 3,500 hunger relief agencies and programs.¹ We support food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and site-based programs like: pantries at K-12 schools, community colleges, and four-year universities; food distribution at low-income senior housing complexes; and special nutrition screening and support at community and hospital health clinics. Since the last state budget our foodbanks have expanded services to a historic number of non-profit and faith-based agencies. Unfortunately, while individuals and corporations give generously, donated food and funding hasn't kept up to meet this increased demand for help with food, personal care, hygiene, and household items, meaning we are rationing resources.

We know that hunger is a symptom of poverty. The reasons for continued high levels of food insecurity are multifaceted, including the widening income gap. More low-wage workers don't earn enough to make ends meet, especially with increasing housing and health care costs, so they find themselves standing in longer food lines today. These lines are also filled with more seniors living on low, fixed incomes. In fact, we've seen a 25 percent increase in seniors at our food pantries in just the past four years. Sixteen percent of these seniors' report that they are responsible for the care of their grandchildren –these families are really the silent victims of a radically changing economy and the crippling effects of raging drug and mass incarceration epidemics.

2017 FIVE-YEAR ESTIMATES

3,673,407 individuals (32.54%)

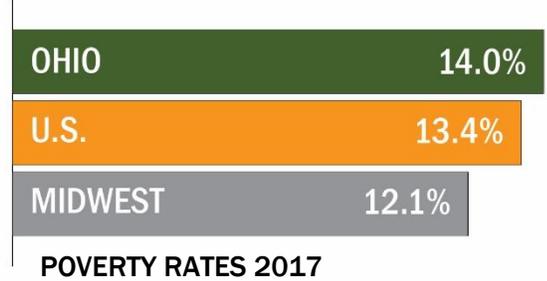


¹ http://ohiofoodbanks.org/docs/publications/SFY2018_annual_report.pdf

Today in Ohio:

- 1 in 5 children live in poverty, including nearly 1 in 4 kids under the age of 5.
- Nearly 1.6 million people live in poverty, and more than 1.75 million are food insecure.

Ohio pays a high cost for allowing food insecurity to persist. For example, we know that interventions like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, make good economic sense as public health policy. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that health care usage and expenditures increase when SNAP (food stamp) benefits decrease, while a modest increase in SNAP benefits contributes to slower growth in health care usage.

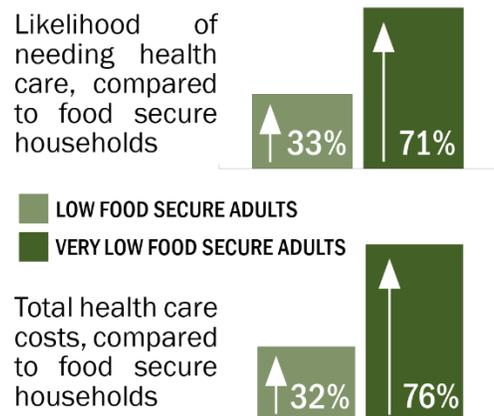
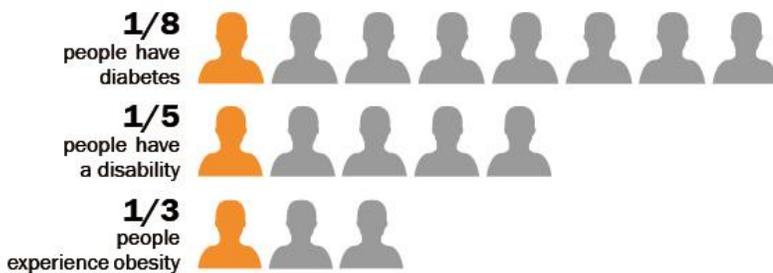



SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger in our nation. SNAP provides 12 meals for every 1 meal we provide through our statewide hunger relief network. An estimated 1.4 million Ohioans turn to SNAP to help feed their families, infusing over \$170 million a month in 100 percent federally funded food assistance into our communities.

We applaud the State for exercising the option to preload and issue February SNAP benefits early during the federal government shutdown. The repercussions of even this short-term delay and disruption in SNAP benefits are significant. The impacts of larger scale cuts and changes to SNAP on demand for help from our network are long-lasting and exponential.

While hunger is a symptom of other social issues, such as poverty and lack of access to nutritious food, it also contributes to other social issues and costs. Hunger can lead to increased healthcare costs, difficulty learning in school, decreased productivity at work, and much more.

In counties with high food insecurity:

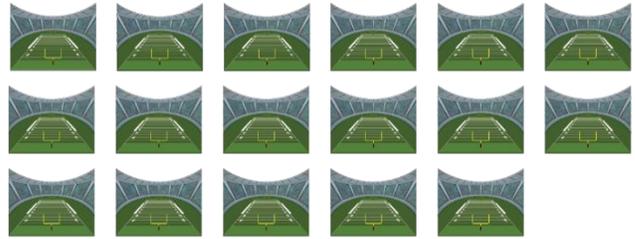


Older Adults Increasingly Rely on Help from Ohio's Foodbanks

Food insecurity in seniors worsens and exacerbates aging issues. Rates of high blood pressure, asthma, depression, chest pain, and limits to activity are higher for food insecure seniors. Chronic conditions and diseases limit employability and increase health care costs.

Demand for help with food from seniors (age 60+) is steadily increasing. Ohio seniors visited food pantries 1.74 million times last year – enough to fill Ohio Stadium 17 times.

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The State of our Economy

According to many accounts, our economy is thriving throughout Ohio and nationally. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate does not tell the entire story. Many Ohio

families are living one medical emergency, one missed day of work because “their child is sick”, “their car has broken down” or “they have had to take in additional family members due to the opioid crisis” away from being in our food lines. Whatever the reason, many Ohioans are living paycheck-to-paycheck and many are working several part-time jobs that simply do not allow them to get ahead. In addition to these families who are living paycheck-to-paycheck there are several families that are stuck in low wage jobs that reduce their ability to break out of poverty.

We strive to seek out solutions to food insecurity that are cost-effective and efficient. Our approach is to focus on **win-win** strategies that promote food security on multiple levels. No program is a greater representation of that approach than our Agricultural Clearance Program. We partner with nearly 100 Ohio farmers, growers, and commodity producers to salvage surplus, unmarketable agricultural product. Not only do we direct millions of pounds of fruits, vegetables, and protein items to Ohio families that can't afford it on their own, but we help to stabilize production issues and find an outlet for excess crops that would otherwise go to waste – lifting up Ohio's agricultural industry in the process.

We need the support of these two incredible state funded programs to help us leverage the resources that our donors and volunteers have provided. We know that there are segments of the economy that have been left behind in our current economic expansion and those are the families that we are serving. This includes many of our brave veterans who fought to protect this country and now need our help.

For twenty years, the State of Ohio has supported the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program. We thank you for your continued support and for allowing us to keep food on the table for our neighbors going through difficult times. While the Ohio House made many needed investments in public systems and public services, now is the time for the Ohio Senate to step forward and support the services provided to their many constituents by

non-profits, faith-based, and volunteer-supported organizations. We ask you to help us reach even more people by supporting an amendment for \$10 million per year for our Comprehensive Approach to Hunger Relief.

These critical programs and the funding that supports them will allow the food banks serving the 88 counties in Ohio and our over 3,500 community partners across the state to continue fight hunger and stabilize lives! Ohio has been the national model when it comes to hunger relief and the support that it provides to every Ohioan as we move our families back to self-reliance. Together we can solve hunger and stabilize lives for those who rely on us each and every day – our children, seniors, veterans, and working families!

Am. Sub. HB 166, the 2020-2021 State Budget, is an opportunity to invest in reducing hunger and food insecurity in the Buckeye state, and to continue the strong, bipartisan support for hunger relief in Ohio that has been present for two decades.

This innovative program is just one of several proven strategies we use to prevent hunger from taking root in Ohio. The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is requesting your support for an amendment to provide an additional \$10 million per year to help fund a ***Comprehensive Approach to Hunger Relief***, representing just \$1.25 per person, per month served by our statewide network. Am. Sub. HB 166 contains flat funding for these critical hunger lifelines at \$19.55 million per year, at a time of rising demand, declining donations, and increasing cost.

The funds will be used for the following programs and initiatives:

- **Ohio Food Program & Agricultural Clearance Program:** Secure and distribute at least 65 million pounds of nutritious, wholesome foods at an average of just 33 cents per pound – providing 30 percent of all food distributed in Ohio.
- **Innovative Summer Meals Programs for Children:** Provide over 2 million kid-friendly, shelf-stable meals and fresh fruits and vegetables to children in rural or underserved areas of Ohio through three proven programs.
- **Wraparound Services to Increase Household Stability:** Complete over 50,000 free tax preparation and filing for low- and moderate-income taxpayers and to leverage matching funding from the USDA for SNAP outreach to serve more than 200,000 Ohioans.
- **Build Capacity to Do More:** Support the purchase of new refrigeration and freezer equipment for food pantries and leverage matching funding for a statewide cohort of hundreds of summer and year-long AmeriCorps VISTA national service members.

To improve public health, education, and our economy, everyone must have access to nutritious food. Ohio needs to invest in an economy that works for all, including low-wage workers, and guarantee that there is access to nutritious food in low-income and rural communities.

Your support of our request will help make critical investments in programs that address food insecurity for the 1 in 6 Ohioans that turn to us for the most basic of all human needs – food. We view this *Comprehensive Approach* as a complete toolbox that would allow our State to respond to emergency food needs, increase access to federal benefits intended to improve household food security, and stabilize hungry households and the nonprofits and faith-based organizations that serve them. These are all essential tools to help families make ends meet during difficult times.

Hunger is not just a moral issue. It also leads to an estimated \$6 billion in healthcare costs. In comparison, research by Feeding America indicates that the meal gap in Ohio is about \$830 million.

In order to help us strengthen the impact of Ohio's foodbank network, we are seeking just a small fraction of that. We humbly request your support for an amendment to provide additional funding to help our statewide network meet current demand, help remove barriers to accessing benefits, and increase capacity to expand services to more of our hungry friends and neighbors. Together, we can ensure our communities have the nutritious food they need to live active, healthy lives.

Thank you and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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