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3960 Brookham Drive

Grove City, Ohio 43123

614.274.7770

info@midohiofoodbank.org

www.midohiofoodbank.org



Ohio House State Government Committee

October 7, 2015

Written Testimony for the Record

Substitute House Bill 241

Marilyn J. Tomasi, Mid-Ohio Foodbank

Good morning Chairman Maag, Vice Chair Kunze and Ranking Minority Member Curtin and members of the House State Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Marilyn Tomasi and I serve as Vice President of Marketing, Communications & Public Affairs at Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

Mid-Ohio Foodbank, the largest food bank in the state with a network of 650 charities located throughout a 20 county footprint, distributed about 60 million pounds of food last year -- enough for 130,066 meals EACH day.

Today, we are respectfully requesting that you support House Bill 241, introduced by Representative Grossman and Representative Curtin. House Bill 241 would officially designate the month of September as “Hunger Action Month.” To give you a brief overview, Hunger Action Month is a nationwide campaign, organized by Feeding America during the month of September to mobilize the public to take action on the issue of hunger. The campaign brings greater attention to hunger in the U.S. and promotes ways for people everywhere to get involved in the movement to fight it.

To truly understand the importance of advocating for our hungry neighbors and the changing face of hunger, I’m reminded about a 14 yr. old young woman who recently visited our on-site Kroger Community Pantry with her mother – and when urged to take some fresh peaches that had been delivered that day from a local farmer and eat one on the way home, she said, “I can’t; it’s not my day to eat...” – coming from a family with a dad who worked two jobs and a mom who stayed home to take care of their three children and two aging parents. Or the fact that if there is food on the table, there are many topics for a family to discuss; if there is no food, there is only ONE topic to discuss. The most basic of needs is food.

As we have witnessed the need in assistance climb 40% since 2010, this legislation will be an important step in continuing to raise awareness about hunger in our communities –about feeding the line/helping those who need food today and about ending the line/doing our part to help lift our hungry neighbors out of poverty and to thrive. Mid-Ohio Foodbank participates in Hunger Action Month through traditional and social media outreach, community engagement and collaboration with other nonprofits, conversations with elected leaders, co-branding initiatives with the private sector, and grassroots efforts—including a 30-day calendar of activities from the SNAP Challenge to a “Nosh for Knowledge” lecture series. Mobilizing our community through any of the activities that take place during Hunger Action Month and throughout the year will increase awareness, prompt engagement and catalyze action to shifts the stats of 1 in 4 children and 1 in 6 adults who do not know where their next meal is coming from. As individuals, charities, businesses and government, we all have a role to play in getting nutritious food to our neighbors.

Household Food Security research released during September by the USDA illustrates a widening gap in food security between Ohio and the rest of the country. The report found that 16.9 percent of Ohioans now live in food insecure households, ranking Ohio sixth nationally for highest rate of food insecurity. With more than 1.7 million Ohioans depending on food stamps through the SNAP program in 2014 – more than 60 percent of whom are children (44 percent), the elderly (nine percent), or Americans with disabilities (10 percent), it is imperative now more than ever to continue to raise awareness.

Again, thank you for showing your consideration for House Bill 241, to designate September as Hunger Action Month. We so much appreciate the concerted efforts of Representatives Grossman and Curtin to bring this legislation forward and the work they do every day to help advance our mission. We look forward to demonstrating the benefits of this legislation by continuing each year to make Hunger Action Month more successful. This legislation will go a long way in raising awareness about our hungry neighbors and those who are struggling in your district. On behalf of hungry Ohioans, thank you for your support.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn J. Tomasi
VP of Marketing/Communications/Public Affairs

