

# Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid

May 15, 2019

Testimony from Lisa Hamler-Fugitt  
Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Good morning Chairman Hackett, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Health and Medicaid Subcommittee. I am Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger.

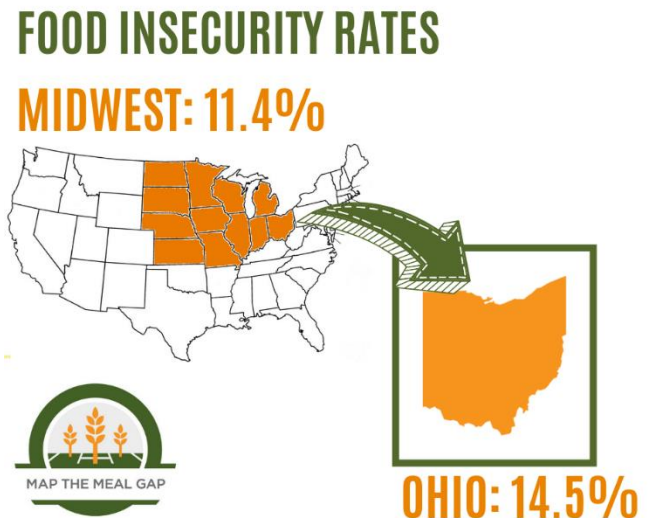
Feeding America recently released its newest *Map the Meal Gap*, research which helps us to understand where household incomes are falling short and leaving families unsure about how to afford enough nutritious food.

The report shows that Ohio's rate of food insecurity is significantly higher than the national average and its Midwestern peers. More than 1 in 7 Ohioans – including 1 in 5 children – still don't always have the resources they need to afford enough food on their own, despite an economic recovery that we're to believe has made things better for everyone.

Let me be clear. Food insecurity does not only impact the very poor. It also impacts the growing number of seniors who are living on fixed incomes and struggling to manage their chronic illnesses, age in their homes, and sometimes care for grandchildren they've graciously taken into their homes. It impacts low-wage workers who find that their paychecks don't stretch to cover housing, healthcare, transportation, child care, and enough healthy groceries to feed their families.

In fact, the new *Map the Meal Gap* report found that about half of all food insecure Ohioans live in households that earn too much to qualify for help from SNAP. For those 829,000 people, food pantries and soup kitchens are the only safety net they have.

The report estimates that an average meal in Ohio costs about \$2.76. That's a very modest budget to afford a healthy breakfast, lunch, or dinner and assumes an ability to shop cost-effectively and prepare home-cooked meals, three times a day. But let's assume that's



## FOOD INSECURITY RATES OHIO COUNTIES

1. Athens County - 19.3%
2. Cuyahoga County - 18.4%
3. Lucas County - 17.5%
4. Scioto County - 17.4%
5. Hamilton County - 17.2%
6. Adams County - 17.2%
7. Montgomery County - 17.0%
8. Meigs County - 16.5%
9. Franklin County - 16.5%
10. Mahoning County - 16.4%

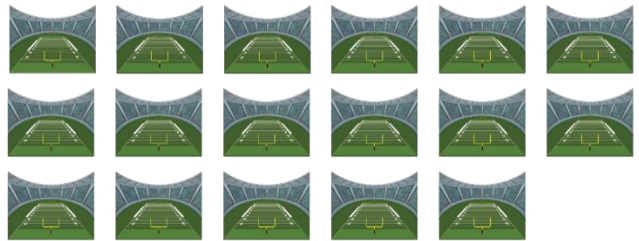


possible. For a family of three, it would cost them about \$750 a month to afford enough food on their own to feed themselves. Unfortunately, food insecure families report that they fall short about \$15.50 per person each week when it comes to their food budgets. That means a family of three is falling short nearly \$200 a month. They're coping in a lot of ways. They're buying cheaper, less healthy food. They're cutting portion sizes or skipping meals. They're trading one late bill payment or one skipped medication for another. They're borrowing from family and friends. And they're turning to our hunger relief network for help.

We're asking you to support total funding of \$30 million per year to support our efforts to make sure they don't have to make harmful choices. That might sound like a lot to some members of this body. But it represents less than 4 percent of the \$800 million annual meal gap that food insecure Ohioans face.

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. It's especially important for our seniors. 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 as Ohio rapidly ages. Ohio seniors visited food pantries 1.74 million times last year – enough to fill Ohio Stadium 17 times.

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Equally important is that our request would easily pay for itself ten times over. Increased access to nutritious, wholesome food improves health outcomes and reduces health care costs. Plus, we have a multiplier affect in Ohio's agricultural economy. Dr. Howard Fleeter found that this body's investment last year in our Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program created 316 jobs and generated nearly \$9 million in additional income.

Most of the \$10.45 million per year increase we are seeking is not “new money.” Many components of our request have been or are currently existing parts of the detailed TANF Spending Plan already and have been for several budget cycles. We are asking that those existing sources of funding – which support proven initiatives like rural summer meals programs and weekend meals programs for children, wraparound benefits outreach, and low-income tax filing services – be combined into one line item to support comprehensive hunger relief. This would give us the flexibility we need to respond to market factors like increases in freight or food costs and would lead to administrative cost savings.

A portion of the funding we are seeking would provide new TANF funding to support capacity building for our network of 12 foodbanks and 3,500 food pantries, soup kitchens, and other hunger relief organizations. It would allow us to upgrade refrigeration and freezers at food pantries to store and distribute more fresh, healthy food in local communities. And it would allow us to rescue even more surplus agricultural products from Ohio’s farmers, growers, and producers. It’s sorely needed by a network that is struggling with declining donations. Some of those declines are due to federal tax law changes that have disincentivized middle class donors from giving. Our network has also seen declines since the federal government shutdown, trade tensions, and stock market volatility put a chill on personal and corporate giving. Similarly, Ohio’s farmers continue to suffer from tariffs and trade disputes – this win-win opportunity would provide them with a humble amount of basic economic security.

Ohio’s foodbanks exhaust every option they have available to respond to the demand for their services. Since the last state budget our foodbanks have expanded services to a historic number of non-profit and faith-based agencies. They provide everything from job training to personal hygiene and household care items to nutrition education. They fundraise day in and day out to keep their shelves stocked, not just with food, but with wholesome, nutritious food. But I’m just going to tell you: it’s not enough. We need the State of Ohio to do more. We need your support for flexibility and resources to respond to the myriad challenges facing food insecure Ohioans.

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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