

Ohio Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid
House Bill 166, SFY2020-2021 Budget
Marilyn Tomasi, Vice President Marketing/Communications/Public Affairs Mid-Ohio Foodbank
May 15, 2019

Chairman Tackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Thomas and members of the subcommittee, I am Marilyn Tomasi, Vice President with Mid-Ohio Foodbank. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to speak to hunger relief, foodbanking and the state budget proposal.

Mid-Ohio Foodbank, as the largest food relief agency in Ohio and the 12th largest in the nation, serves 20 counties from Chillicothe to Marion and Marysville to Belmont. Distributing more than 65 million pounds of food last year, we serve more than 524,000 Ohio children, seniors, veterans and the disabled a year, enough food for 140,000 meals each and every day. Half of the food we distribute is fresh food – meat, vegetables, dairy, bread, and fruit....yet hunger persists.

As we look at our work moving forward, it's not only about food for today, but access to resources tomorrow so our Ohio families can thrive for a lifetime. In recent years, we, as a learning and innovative organization, have become increasingly smarter - realizing that to truly end hunger in our Ohio communities, we must focus our work on getting the right food to the right place at the right time. As such, we have focused our core efforts toward connecting our hungry neighbors with nutritious food while eliminating access barriers. We conducted a recent pilot with PrimaryOne Health (FQHCC) which provided fresh food to a test group of nearly 10,000 of their patients; the results showed that proactively connecting nutritious food to low-income Ohioans lowered both blood sugar levels and weight, producing cost-effective approaches to managing diabetes, a common health issue among those we serve. We broke ground on urban farms, providing fresh produce and opportunities for neighborhood residents to learn & prepare healthy food options. We worked with community interests on establishing South Side Roots Café, Kitchen, Market, Kids' Program and Catering, offering an economically-distressed area healthy, affordable food in a setting that connects them to additional, wrap-around services.

We created a customer database system that has allowed us to more efficiently operate, that is now being used by food banks throughout Ohio and around the country. Through this system, we can track hunger relief in more productive ways in order to deliver better customer service. We improved our efficiencies to more cost effectively provide food to our 680 pantry partner network while ensuring that less food is wasted.

We, like the 200-plus food banks across the country, obtain food from multiple sources for distribution through our network. Retail partners contribute food they may not be able to sell but is still good & safe. Food drives and other community efforts help supply our chain. We fundraise, which allows us to purchase food, often at about one-tenth the retail cost. And, one of our major food suppliers is the Ohio Food Program & Agricultural Clearance Program, a federal program administered by the state.

It is this federal and state support of hunger relief that I want to speak to. Currently, \$19.55 million is allocated yearly in the budget bill for Ohio's Clearance Program. Likewise, funds were allocated for summer meal programs for youth, for programs to leverage funds from federal programs and to support charitable efforts, including the AmeriCorps VISTA program that provides opportunities for young adults to work in the hunger relief field. The foodbanking network has sought to consolidate these programs into a single line item totaling \$30 million per year, which represents combined funding with a modest increase to support statewide hunger relief. Should this proposal come before this subcommittee, we ask that it be favorably considered.

We at Mid-Ohio Foodbank, as well as food banks across the state and country, are working with health care and other service providers to include food as part of a holistic effort to address the underlying issues that cause hunger -- housing, transportation and employment issues, as well as health care and other social determinants of poverty. That is the basis for the effort to consolidate state funding for hunger relief, to best address all the conditions that contribute to hunger because as we all know, hunger does not work in isolation.

Mr. Chairman and members of the community; Mid-Ohio Foodbank and food banks throughout the country are changing how we respond to hunger, all with one goal in mind - ending hunger. We are unique as an advanced logistics business in that our goal is to put ourselves out of business, which will only happen if we work together to eradicate hunger. We appreciate the support through the years for our efforts and ask that you continue to support hunger relief initiatives and to support efforts to tie hunger relief to other social efforts to improve the conditions that lead to hunger, to provide a pathway to self-sufficiency.

I will end by noting that much of our fundraising and direct support comes from some of the leading business enterprises in our service area. These visionary leaders have recognized that hunger is detrimental to the community and to their bottom lines. These business savvy thought leaders know that hunger compromises our educational system when a hungry child is impeded in learning; our competitive workforce depreciates because a hungry adult's productivity is low; our healthcare system is afflicted because our hungry neighbors are not able to access nutritious food - all issues that impact all sectors of our communities. By providing food today through a comprehensive approach, we can successfully work toward providing a pathway for our current customers to support themselves in the future and to work, live and thrive within our communities.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention today. I am happy to answer any questions today or to follow up with additional information. I will conclude by urging each of you to visit your local foodbank to see how their operation functions and to learn more about what we are doing to end hunger. Thank you.