



**Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
May 28, 2019**

**Testimony from Kimberly LoVano, Director of Advocacy & Public Education  
Greater Cleveland Food Bank**

Thank you Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 166. I am truly honored to be here.

I am Kimberly LoVano, 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. Last year we made possible 57 million meals in Ashland, Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Richland Counties. We are one of twelve Ohio food banks that provide food to hunger programs in every county throughout the state. We thank you for your longstanding support of the Ohio Food Program and the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program. To put it simply, these two programs are critical to food insecure families across our state who lack access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle.

Last year, the twelve food banks across Ohio provided food to more than two million people through a network of 3,500 nonprofit partner programs. Although the recession ended ten years ago, we are serving more clients than ever. Within the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's six-county service area alone, we provide food to more than 300,000 children, veterans, working parents, and older adults who have a difficult time making ends meet.

I still vividly remember meeting two of those older adults at a program near the Pennsylvania border in Ashtabula County. It is a rural community, with no cell reception and nothing nearby but farm land and a stop sign. The husband was filling out a survey, but had trouble keeping his hand still. Noticing this, his wife began to cry. She told us that her husband had suffered a stroke a few months earlier and he had not yet fully recovered. The stroke had changed their lives and his new medication cost nearly \$400 per month. Medical bills were stacking up from his time in the hospital and they just couldn't manage all of the expenses. Their refrigerator was empty and there was no money left to buy food. They had started coming to this program so they could at least keep food on the table.

In addition to this couple and the many older adults we see at our network of programs, we also continue to see working families. A couple of months ago, I met a woman at our monthly produce distribution who had worked in low-wage jobs her entire life and was living paycheck to paycheck. It broke her heart to learn that her two growing sons had cut back on how much they ate, knowing that their mother could not afford groceries. With her dwindling savings, she started to tap into her 401k in order to keep food in the refrigerator. That had been the catalyst for her to turn to our produce distribution for help. Being able to access free, nutritious food meant that her sons could eat full meals and she could pay the bills.

These stories are not unique. Unfortunately, nearly two-thirds of the households served by our partner programs report making the decision between paying for medication or paying for groceries during the month, or choosing between food and utilities. In the Greater Cleveland area, only one of the ten most common occupations, nursing, provided an income that kept a family of three above 200% of the

poverty line (\$42,660 in 2019), which is the eligibility limit to receive food from food banks. Parents have gone back to work since the recession, but they are still struggling to pay for their children's basic needs. Seniors are living longer and running out of savings. The need has continued to grow in not only the city center of Cleveland, but also in the suburban and rural areas that surround it. Food provided by the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program help make hard choices a little easier and provide low-income Ohioans with nutritious food while also paying for basic necessities, like medicine, rent, utilities, and transportation.

One-quarter of the food distributed by the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, as well as the eleven other food banks in Ohio, comes from these two state programs. I can confidently say that we could not serve this many children, seniors, veterans and families without them.

We continue to expand our reach within our service area and create innovative and effective programs to get this food out to our community. A great example of this is our 147 mobile pantry programs, where a truckload of fresh Ohio produce is delivered to a church or partner agency to be distributed to their clients the same day. In addition to this program, we have partnered with 35 senior centers and low-income apartment buildings to provide local produce to seniors.

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 the investments in public systems and public services, we need your help to support the services provided to your 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.

The amendment increases funding for proven programs and incorporates existing items into the state budget, such as the innovative summer meals programs. The amendment would provide an increase to the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance Programs, allowing food banks to strengthen their partnership with farmers across Ohio and provide even more local produce and protein items to those in need. It would also help hunger-relief programs to store this fresh food through purchasing refrigeration and freezer equipment. The amendment would incorporate existing funding for the innovative summer meals programs into the Ohio Association of Foodbank's state budget allocation, which are currently funded through the Governor's Office on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Having all of these programs in one place in the state budget would allow food banks to operate programs with less administrative burden to the state, reduce overhead costs, and allow for more flexibility to leverage better food pricing.

This invaluable funding will allow the food banks and our partner networks across the state to continue our impactful work in meeting the increased need of all who rely on the nutritious food and crucial services that we provide daily – our children, seniors, veterans, and working families – thereby, ensuring that they, too, can contribute to our state's overall health and well-being.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.