Good afternoon Chairman Schuring, Ranking member O’Brien and members of the committee.

My name is Lawrence Novak, and I am the pastor of First Lutheran Church in Bellefontaine, Ohio, and I am a board member of the Hunger Network in Ohio.

I would like to speak today in opposition to Senate Bill 165. Our church helps run a food pantry next to our church called “Our Daily Bread”. We serve a free meal to people in the neighborhood five days a week, Monday through Friday, and we run a food pantry and thrift store that are both open six days a week, Monday through Saturday. Almost everyone who uses Our Daily Bread is on SNAP. I sat down with a few folks this past week and asked them what they thought of having a picture on their SNAP card. One woman named Ruth, who comes to Our Daily Bread on a regular basis, was concerned. She often buys groceries with a SNAP card for her neighbor, who is an invalid. Her neighbor is white, and Ruth is African-American. She was concerned that the cashier at Kroger or Aldi would be suspicious if she presented a card with a picture of a white lady on it; suspecting her of some sort of deception!

Now, I understand that, in all likelihood, that particular situation might not be an issue, since Ruth’s neighbor may qualify for an exemption to the picture requirement if she is disabled. But if an ID were required for Ruth’s neighbor, you can understand her concern. The real question is: “Why are we putting up hurdles to hungry people getting food?” A photo requirement will only cause more confusion, especially since it is perfectly legal to allow anyone else in the household to go to the store to buy food, and even legal to ask your friend, neighbor, or pastor to purchase food for you using their card. In the neighborhood around my church, this happens all the time. I see this legislation leading to cashiers reporting allegations of fraud that turn out to be nothing of the kind.

Other speakers have already spoken on matters involving the increased administrative costs of adding a picture to a SNAP card, and how this legislation has been tried and rejected in other states, so I shall not re-hash those arguments. My concern is that we are once again passing a law that stigmatizes the poor and makes them jump through hoops that we would never ask of someone who is middle class or wealthy. You and I can go into a store any day of the week and purchase groceries with a credit card and not have to show any ID. Why make a person on SNAP do it?

My congregation currently opens our building three days a week to AA and NA, and I sit on the treatment and recovery services committee of CORE (Coalition for Opiate Relief Efforts) in Logan County. I understand that sometimes desperate people in the throes of a drug addiction will sell their SNAP cards for drugs. But I cannot see how a photo ID on a SNAP card will prevent this from happening. In fact, many people I spoke with at CORE have said that it won’t. In addition, my understanding is that the SNAP program has one of the lowest rates of fraud of any government program.

One of the last instructions Jesus gave to his disciples before his ascension was “feed my sheep”. This legislation hinders that command. A bill that drastically increases administrative costs, that will lead to confusion and false accusations of fraud, that puts another road block to hungry people getting food, and that fails to adequately address the problem of people selling SNAP cards for drugs needs to be voted down.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.