

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 3.2.2021

Name: Dan Flowers

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank

Position/Title: President & CEO

Address: 350 Opportunity Parkway

City: Akron State: OH Zip: 44307

Best Contact Telephone: 330-535-6900 Email: dflowers@acrfb.org

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): H.B. 110

Specific Issue: Funding for Ohio's Food Banks

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Please see enclosed testimony regarding increased funding for Ohio's statewide hunger relief network

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Ohio House Finance Committee Health and Human Services Subcommittee

House Bill 110

Ohio Food Bank Funding

Dan Flowers, President & CEO, Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank

March 4, 2021

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and Representatives Edwards, Lipps, and Russo,

My name is Dan Flowers, and I am humbled to serve as President & CEO of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. I am testifying as an interested party to House Bill 110, the state operating budget, and in support of funding for Ohio's food banks. The Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank serves food insecure Ohioans in Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas, and Wayne counties through a network of more than 500 food pantries, hot meal sites, shelters, and other community food programs. Food insecurity was an issue in our service area before the pandemic. It is estimated that, in 2018, 192,950 individuals in our service area experienced food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue, increasing food insecurity in our region by more than 30% (according to the most recent estimate provided by Feeding America).

We have been distributing food directly to the public from our warehouse in Akron since 2018. After schools and businesses began to close in March 2020, the number of families served at these distributions tripled. We had to quickly pivot to a drive through distribution to ensure the safety of community members and staff. Through these distributions, we have met many families that had never visited a food program before the pandemic hit. We heard stories about lost jobs, concerns about losing their homes, shame about needing help, and gratitude for our work. This trend of an increase in demand and new families needing help hit our entire hunger-relief network, as programs primarily led by volunteers answered the call and found new ways to provide food safely and efficiently to our community members in need of this support. We met this challenge – distributing more than 27 million meals in our service area in 2020.

We know from experience that the road to recovery is long and the challenges ahead for our community are many. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, Ohio household food security did not recover to pre-recession levels for a decade. Despite modest, temporary increases in the federal nutrition safety net, our network continues to see a high demand for food assistance. That experience is true for our fellow foodbanks that comprise the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. The support provided through the state budget is critical to our ability to provide fresh, nourishing food to the people in our service area experiencing food insecurity. In fact, the OFPACP funding provides more than 20 percent of all the food distributed statewide by Ohio's 12 Feeding America food banks.

We join the Ohio Association of Foodbanks in requesting funding and support to meet the long-term demand we expect to continue for many months. We urge your support for:

- \$12 million pass-through of federal CARES Act funding for emergency food, including Ohio-grown fruits and vegetables; shelf-stable food; and, personal care products for calendar year 2021.
- \$45 million per year in the 2022-23 biennial budget (primarily funded by pass-through TANF dollars), including \$40 million per year for the operation of the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program; \$4 million per year to purchase, transport, store and distribute essential household non-food items that cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits; and \$1 million per year to support capacity building for local hunger relief organizations.

We are requesting this funding to support the more than 250,000 families in our service area experiencing food insecurity. The families seeking our help have experienced stress and anxiety for months not knowing how they would get by. We can continue to be a source of food and other non-food essential items, meeting their basic needs and freeing up their limited income to cover other necessary expenses like housing, health care, transportation, and childcare.

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for your consideration of this important request. We will share any additional information or answer any questions you may have about our work and the impact of the pandemic on our community. We welcome the opportunity for you to visit your local food bank and volunteer alongside us and the Ohio National Guard members to experience how we work to feed our communities each day.

On behalf of the Akron-Canton Regional foodbank, our hunger-relief network, and our community members experiencing food insecurity – thank you for your service, your commitment to community, and your continued investment in our Ohio’s recovery from the pandemic.

Dan Flowers

President & CEO

Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank