

# House Bill 110 Testimony

The food insecurity in Ohio is an urgent problem that must be addressed. Food insecurity and unemployment rates are at an all-time high due to the unforeseen effects of COVID-19, which has created so many hardships for Ohio families. More than 1 in 4 Ohio children lived in food insecure households in 2020. Families with children have been crippled by lost savings, increased household debt, and rising food prices. It's estimated that 1 in 5 working parents have quit their jobs (or taken leave, if available to them) to supervise and facilitate virtual learning for their young children. Children have lost access to traditional school meals, including free or reduced meals. It's more important than ever that the State of Ohio use federal dollars, like the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant, to meet basic needs for low-income families, including food.

Hunger negatively impacts children, preventing them from learning and growing at the same rates as their food secure peers. As school children throughout Ohio work to make up for the learning loss and behavioral and mental health impacts of the pandemic, they need to have adequate, nutritious food to support their growing brains and bodies. Household expenses were already a struggle for some workers before the pandemic. The unemployment rate remains high as job losses, lower wages, and fewer benefits has left many with the tough choice between paying for rent, utilities, or food. More than 1 in 5 of the people served by Ohio's foodbanks are over age 60. Feeding America estimates that half of the people served by Ohio's foodbanks aren't eligible for SNAP. For hundreds of thousands of Ohioans, our network is the only place they can get help with keeping food on the table. High unemployment rates and loss of income from jobs has led to a massive increase in demand at our state's foodbanks at a time when we are facing significant operational challenges, including loss of volunteers, fundraising revenue and donated foods.

Ohio National Guard soldiers make it possible for foodbanks to ramp up home delivery, mass direct distributions, pre-packed emergency food boxes, and other responses necessitated by the pandemic, as well as standing in for elderly volunteers and corporate and student volunteer groups. They also made it possible for foodbanks to keep up with the sheer volume of demand driven by the 2020 pandemic. Some of our local food pantries have permanently closed, creating new challenges for providing access to food. We have had to add additional mobile distributions and developed a new program, the traveling food pantry to meet the increased need. By helping Ohio households meet their basic needs, like food and essential non-food household items, we can free up more of their limited incomes for utilities, housing, transportation, health care, child care, education, recovering from debt, and regaining lost emergency savings. We can also help Ohioans heal from the stress, anxiety, and indignity of months spent not knowing how they would get by. We can invest in their basic needs and reassure them that they won't be left behind in this economic recovery.

Ohio's hunger relief network is requesting that the State of Ohio invest \$12 million in pass-through federal CARES Act funding to support the purchase and distribution of emergency foods, including Ohio-grown fruits and vegetables, Ohio-raised protein, and Ohio-produced dairy, as well as shelf-stable items and essential non-food items such as personal care and personal hygiene products, household paper goods, and household cleaning items throughout 2021. \$45 million per year in the 2022-23 biennial budget (primarily funded through 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 can't be purchased with SNAP benefits, and \$1 million per year to support capacity building for local hunger relief organizations to ensure hard-hit communities don't lose local access to charitable relief.