

House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Emily Gallion
Advocacy Manager
The Foodbank, Inc.
Egallion@thefoodbankdayton.org



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Interested Party Testimony, H.B. 110

The Foodbank, Inc. relieves hunger in the community through a network of partner agencies by acquiring and distributing food. Headquartered in Dayton, we distributed 17.9 million pounds of food in Montgomery, Greene, and Preble counties last fiscal year. We are submitting this testimony with regards to H.B. 110, which will impact funding for a wide variety of issues related to our mission.

Over the past year, we have heard countless times from individuals in our area who have seen their livelihoods evaporate due to the impact of the pandemic. Many of them feel they have done everything right and never expected to be in a position where they cannot meet their basic needs.

At the height of the pandemic, the percent of households seeking food assistance from our network for the first time passed 70% at some distributions. Simultaneously, about 40% of our partner agencies were forced to close, and many of them still have not reopened. The pandemic has placed immense pressure on our network: We have spent more money than ever before on wholesale food purchases, hired temporary staff to offset losses in volunteer labor, and organized mass food distributions of record-breaking size.

Feeding America projections estimate that in The Foodbank's service territory, which encompasses Montgomery, Greene, and Preble counties, food insecurity has increased 28% due to the pandemic. Most recent projections indicate a total of 135,860 individuals are food insecure.

While this data is useful for communicating the impact of COVID-19 in our area, it is subject to several limitations. Significantly, it does not reflect the effects of the May 2019 tornado outbreak in our area. In the predominantly Black, high-poverty region of Trotwood alone, the storm inflicted more than \$18 million in damage and displaced at least 1,200 people. Many homes in this area are still vacant.

Food insecurity is a leading indicator that can forecast upcoming hardships, such as housing challenges. Notably, the Census Bureau's most recent Pulse Survey, released February 24, placed the percent of Ohio adults at risk of eviction or foreclosure in the

next two months at 49.7%. Given the severity of hardship many Ohio families are facing, it is more important now than ever for the state of Ohio to utilize federal dollars such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant to help low-income families stay fed, housed, and secure.

While we are hopeful for the future, it is likely that financial recovery from the pandemic will be slow. After the Great Recession, rates of food insecurity in Ohio did not return to pre-recession levels for 10 years. Given the ongoing uncertainty so many Ohio families are facing, we encourage the state to make the investments necessary to support low-income individuals in our area. Alongside other hunger relief advocates across the state, we are requesting:

- \$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.

We are grateful to partner with our lawmakers at the state level to fulfill our vision that "no one should go hungry." Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.