

*Ohio Senate Finance Committee*

*SC2155 and SC2155X1 to H.B. 110*

*Ohio Food Bank Funding*

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

*May 12, 2021*

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Dan Flowers, and I am humbled to serve as President & CEO of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. I'm submitting written testimony to ask for your consideration and support of Amendments SC2155 and SC2155X1 to H.B. 110, which would provide a one-time-only, temporary 2-year funding increase of \$20 million per year in Section 307.40 to help provide: emergency food assistance relief through the Ohio Association of Foodbanks Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program; other essential household non-food items that can't be purchased with SNAP benefits; and a \$1 million investment per year to support capacity building for local hunger relief organizations to ensure hard-hit communities don't lose local access to charitable food relief.

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 2019, 190,210 individuals in our service area experienced food insecurity. Demand significantly increased in 2020, with more than 230,000 individuals estimated to have experienced food insecurity during the year.

2020 showed us just how fragile food security can be. Families lost wages and businesses shuttered. Essential workers and work-from-home households struggled with childcare, healthcare, educating their children and managing budgets. As these stressors weighed heavily on our society, the strength of the Foodbank's network was tested and our faithful supporters responded like no other time in the Foodbank's nearly 40-year history. We utilized available food resources through the USDA and state of Ohio, paired with private donations and partnerships, to maximize resources and meet this challenge. In 2020, we distributed more than 27 million meals in our service area.

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. We also recognized that many community members were unable to leave their homes to access these large, drive through distributions. In partnership with local community partners and Door Dash, we began a home delivery service utilizing Door Dash drivers to ensure home bound individuals and families had access to the food they needed. In the first full year of this program, more than 5,000 families in our region have received deliveries through this partnership. Partnerships allow our network to leverage available resources from the state to reach further and feed more.

Throughout our network, 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 may be 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. 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.

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 Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance 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 Ohio's recovery from the pandemic.

Dan Flowers

President & CEO

Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank