

**Ohio Senate Finance Committee**  
**House Bill 110**  
**Ohio Food Bank Funding**  
**Matt Habash, President/CEO Mid-Ohio Food Collective**  
**May 13, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Committee, I am Matt Habash, President and CEO of Mid-Ohio Food Collective. Today, I am sharing this written testimony as an interested party to House Bill 110, the state operating budget, and in particular, in support of funding for Ohio's food banks.

Mid-Ohio Food Collective is the largest food relief agency in Ohio and one of the largest in the nation, serving 20 urban, rural and Appalachian counties from Chillicothe to Marion and Marysville to Belmont, including Columbus. Since the onset of the pandemic, from March 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021, demand for food assistance has significantly increased, with hungry neighbors now making more than 1.2 million visits to our agency partner network, accounting for over 88 million pounds of food distributed. Even more alarming are the 64,000 plus families who are asking for food - for help - for the first time; displaced workers, isolated seniors and children without consistent access to school meals.

First, I want to say thank you. Our ability to respond to the dramatic increase for food assistance during these extraordinary times is due in large part to the support of local, state and federal governments. We appreciate the actions taken by our public policy leaders to ensure that we could safely respond. Within a single week from the onset of the pandemic, we completely shifted our receiving and distribution model through regulatory waivers. In particular, the deployment of Ohio's National Guard and Military Reserve was mission-critical in our being able to meet the increased needs of our neighbors. Thank you for both your partnership and leadership.

Our experience mirrors that of our sister food banks across the state. There is unprecedented food assistance needed across the state, including in our own footprint of service. We are continuing to work hard, implementing new changes to meet increased demand, such as expanding the hours of our onsite pantry to 40 hours per week, open six days per week. We know that this is a marathon at a sprinter's pace. Many of the neighbors who we serve were struggling before the onset of the pandemic; their hardships are now greater than ever – hardships that will take years from which to recover.

We join the Ohio food bank network in requesting funding and support to meet this long-term demand. We ask for your consideration and support of Amendments SC2155 and SC2155X1 to HB110, which would provide a one-time-only, temporary two-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 cannot 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 do not lose local access to relief. This is reflective of the unprecedented era of hunger and financial instability experienced as a result of COVID-19. This is a critical investment to help Ohioans get through these turbulent times to better days ahead.

Mr. Chair and members of the subcommittee, thank you for your time and consideration. We at Mid-Ohio Food Collective are happy to answer questions or share additional information. I will also ask each of you to visit your local food bank to see firsthand their operations and to learn more about what we are doing to end hunger. Please accept this as our invitation for you to visit the Mid-Ohio Food Collective at your convenience.

On behalf of the Mid-Ohio Food Collective, we urge you to support the funding requests for House Bill 110 from Ohio's food bank network. More specifically, we ask for your support of our neighbors – seniors, children, the disabled, veterans and those who have seen their work and personal circumstances change so dramatically in the past year. Together, we can bridge the gap, helping families to connect to the most basic of needs - food.

Thank you,

Matt Habash  
President/CEO  
Mid-Ohio Food Collective  
[mhabash@mindohiofoodbank.org](mailto:mhabash@mindohiofoodbank.org)  
(614) 274-7770