

Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Tommie Harner and I am the CEO of West Ohio Food Bank.

The West Ohio Food Bank has a service territory of 11 counties within West Central Ohio. Those counties include: Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Mercer, Paulding, Putnam, Seneca, Shelby, Van Wert and Wyandot. We have over one-hundred plus partner agencies providing food to our hungry neighbors on a daily basis. Our mission is: Everyone should have access to healthy, nutritious food. Together with our partners, we provide nutritious food to those in need.

On March 23, 2020, over twenty-three United States National Guards arrived at our foodbank to assist in outreach efforts when COVID-19 was in full force. Over the next few weeks, we had over fifty guards arrive to assist us. From March 23, 2020 through April 30, 2021, West Ohio Food Bank distributed over 15 million pounds of food or the equivalent of 12.5 million meals to over 22 thousand unduplicated families of which 12 thousand plus were new to the food bank network. This outreach was done through our partner agencies and over 200 community-wide food distributions, and the need is not easing up at this time. We continue to see new faces of individuals in need of food assistance. The reasoning for this varies, however children account for 29% of service and seniors account for 24%. We are seeing many seniors with their aged children and grandchildren living in their household so their fixed budgets are having to be stretched even more so with additional costs of living expenses. As the economy slowly begins to get a little better, the need for food assistance will have lasting effects over the next couple of years as individuals begin to return to what normality was for them prior to COVID. We anticipate an increase of an additional 1-2 million pounds of food each year to meet the need of the food insecure individuals within our service area.

West Ohio Food Bank was never in the service of providing as many community-wide food distributions as we have been since COVID-19. Typically, our service was involved utilizing our partner agencies to provide food to individuals in need while hosting 1 distribution per month at our facility. Because of COVID, many of our partner agencies have lost volunteers because of them being aged and not comfortable with being in a public setting. Some agencies have also had to limit their hours of operation or close their doors because of lack of volunteers which has made the need for additional community-wide distributions more critical than ever. The donations we have received through retail stores have also decreased over the past year making our food bank more reliable on federal commodities or having to purchase additional food to meet the need.

Funds that have been received through West Ohio Food Bank has been instrumental in assisting us with meeting the growing need we have had and continue to see. We have utilized our partnership with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to leverage their buying power to purchase additional food items and produce to provide to our clientele. We anticipate using our local Ohio farmers such as Suter Farms to purchase fresh produce and provide it to our clients within the upcoming months.

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 relief.

Receiving these requested funds are needed now more than ever. Without receiving emergency food assistance relief through the Ohio Association of Foodbanks Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program, the donated food received would not be enough to provide to the thousands of individuals within our service area who are food insecure. While SNAP benefits are vital to these families, they cannot provide essential household non-food items that are needed for a healthy, day-to-day life. Many individuals struggle to acquire laundry soap, personal hygiene items, cleaning supplies because they do not have the available funds to purchase these items.

As our need continues to grow, so does the need to increase capacity within our organization. With most of our service territory being rural, we must be creative with ways to get access to food for the individuals who do not have grocery stores nearby or do not have emergency pantries within the area they live. We are hopeful that you will support this request so that the thousands of families who rely on foodbank services can continue to receive food to assist in supporting their households and stretching their budgets to pay for other necessities they have such as rent/mortgage, utilities, and medications.

Thank you for your consideration of this request,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tommie Warner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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