



Our vision is a hunger-free, healthy, and thriving community.

May 4, 2021

Kurt L. Reiber, President & CEO
Freestore Foodbank
Ohio Senate Health Committee Amended Sub. HB 110

Subject: Amended Sub. HB 110 – Funding for Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Good Afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks budget request regarding amending substitute HB 110 – the State Operating Budget.

Thank you for considering my testimony in support of increased funding for statewide hunger relief. My name is Kurt Reiber, President & CEO of Freestore Foodbank, we are a nonprofit organization serving our neighbors in Southwest Ohio including the counties of Hamilton, Clermont, Adams, Brown, Highland, Pike, Clinton and Scioto Counties, along with 9-counties in Northern Kentucky and 3-counties in Eastern Indiana through roughly 600 pantries, soup kitchens and congregate feeding sites.

Our team of 125 at Freestore Foodbank are on the front-line in the fight to end hunger and our vision is to create a hunger-free, healthy and thriving community. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic 1 in 7 of our neighbors were dealing with food insecurity, with 1 in 5 of those neighbors being children under the age of 18. That represents approximately 245,000 of our tristate neighbors, of which 75,000 are children. In addition to providing our region with 38 million meals, Freestore also provides stabilization services; benefit outreach including SNAP, Medicaid and Unemployment benefits enrollment, along with two workforce development programs – Cincinnati COOKS! and LIFT the TriState, that provides free employment training in the culinary and logistics industries, respectively.

We are working with area hospitals including Cincinnati Children's, TriHealth, the VA Medical Center and St. Elizabeth's to open health clinic pantries to support our KIND Program that provides infant formula to families while providing healthy and nutritious food to the rest of the family.

We work with area colleges and universities, together with local school districts to establish food pantries on their campuses to support students impacted by food insecurity. We support our seniors and retired and active military personnel through our Senior Food Box and Emergency Food Box

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programs, so that the greatest generation and our military families know that we are here to support them during their hour of need.

As we have responded to the increased need brought on by the business closures, furloughs and layoffs, we have witnessed an unparalleled increase in overall demand year-over-year and roughly, 75% of the families who have received food through our large-scale emergency food distributions are new to our network and have never had to rely on charitable food relief! COVID-19 has created the “perfect storm” for Ohio families.

On average, the Freestore Foodbank is distributing 1 million pounds of food per week throughout our 20-county service area. We are forecasting that the total number of meals that will be distributed in our current fiscal year will likely exceed 48 million, compared to the 38 million meals that our Freestore team and our 600+ pantry network distributed during our last fiscal year. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we work collaboratively to invest in food and economic security and ensure an equitable recovery for all Ohioans.

On behalf of the Freestore Foodbank and Ohio’s hunger relief network, I humbly ask for your support of an amendment to Sub. H.B. 110 to provide additional 2-year temporary support of \$20 million per year to support the purchase of additional perishable and shelf stable foods through the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP) and personal care, personal hygiene and household cleaning supplies (items that cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits).

This temporary 2-year funding will help support and expand our win-win-win programs - beyond providing additional direct relief for hungry Ohio families, it also will make an economic impact while fighting hunger. A 2020 independent economic analysis conducted by Howard Fletter of the Ohio Food Program, Agricultural Clearance Program, & Executive Order Programs, found these programs generated \$18.9 million in direct economic output and \$20.0 million in indirect economic output, as well as generating \$11.5 million in income and creating 401 Ohio jobs – Page 10.

https://ohiofoodbanks.org/site/assets/files/2570/anti-hunger_legislative_playbook_134th_ga.pdf

By helping our hungry neighbors meet their basic needs, like food and essential non-food household items, we can free up their limited incomes for utilities, housing, transportation, health care, child care, education, recovering from debt and regaining lost emergency savings.

Together we will provide greater economic mobility for our Ohio families. We know that this recovery will not happen overnight. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, Ohio household food insecurity did not recover to pre-recession levels for a decade.

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The need for help with food and therefore the need for Ohio foodbanks to provide that help will not subside as quickly as the immediate public health crisis.

Together, we can create an Ohio that is hunger-free, healthy and thriving!

Thank you for this opportunity and for your previous support and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Sincerely,

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