



## **Children's Hunger Alliance**

**Testimony: HB 33**

**FY 2024-25 Biennial Budget**

**Judy Mobley, President & CEO**

**Children's Hunger Alliance**

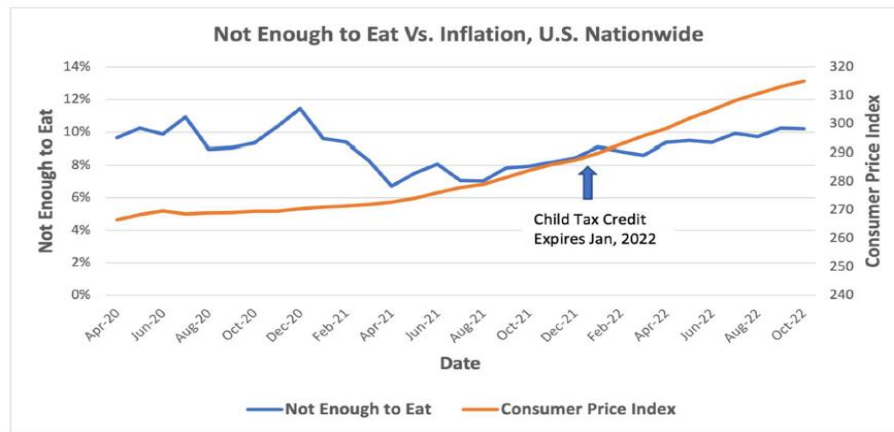
**March 22, 2023**

### **Background**

Good morning, Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. I am Judy Mobley, President and CEO of Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA), a non-profit organization dedicated to the alleviation of childhood hunger in Ohio. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to you today regarding our funding request in the FY 24-25 budget.

Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA) is a statewide non-profit organization founded in 1970 whose headquarters is in Columbus and with regional offices in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Toledo. Our mission is to ensure that food insecure children have access to the food they need to live a healthy life. Children's Hunger Alliance does this through our collaboration with over 1,400 partners across the state. We define food insecurity as limited or uncertain access to enough food to support a healthy life. Many children living in food insecure homes simply don't know where their next meal will come from. They get up in the morning to no food and many go to bed each night hungry. According to the most recent food insecurity statistics from Feeding America, Ohio ranks 13th highest by percentage of children at 15.9% and 5<sup>th</sup> highest based on the actual number of children with more than 412,000 of Ohio's children experiencing hunger.

During the pandemic, food insecurity rates among households with children were at a record low due to the creation or strengthening of benefits including, Pandemic EBT, Child Tax Credit, and critical USDA waivers which allowed Children's Hunger Alliance to feed more children than at any other time in our over 50-year history. Unfortunately, many of these programs have now expired so food insecurity for children once again is on the rise. According to U.S. Census Pulse Data published in a recent report by Hunger Free America, the number of households in the U.S. reporting not having enough food has risen to levels not seen since early in the pandemic (April 2020). We have included a chart that shows the direct correlation between the increase in inflation and the increase in food insecurity.



Children’s Hunger Alliance has expanded our partnerships to meet the growing need for our services. Over the past two years we have provided, with our partners, approximately 19 million meals to Ohio’s children in childcare centers, family childcare homes, afterschool programs and summer meal programs. We are one of the largest and most geographically diverse sponsors in Ohio of the USDA’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) administered by the Ohio Department of Education. We currently sponsor 76 childcare centers, 572 family childcare providers, 346 afterschool programs and 182 summer meal programs across the state.

In addition to our CACFP and SFSP sponsorship work we have a team that works across the state with schools to increase breakfast participation. We partner with school districts to evaluate their existing breakfast model and help them implement best practices that increase breakfast participation in a cost-effective manner. At the present time we are partnering with 121 schools to increase breakfast participation. We have many examples of the success this type of collaboration can achieve and in the end the children are the real beneficiaries because more of them can start their school day ready to learn.

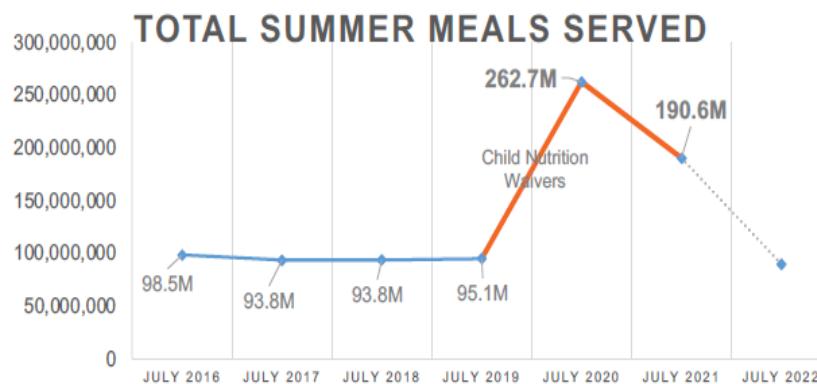
Our CACFP work and work directly with schools allows us to serve children where they are and ensure they receive healthy meals *before, during* and *after* school each day. This is critical to their wellbeing especially when a hungry child doesn’t have access to enough food at home.

We all know that schools play a vital role in childhood nutrition for children living in poverty, but children are hungry every day – not just on school days. That is why we expanded our work to include a weekend meal program. As a reminder, there is no federal nutrition program to help feed food insecure children on the weekends which is why state funding is so critical.

We also know that unfortunately only 10 percent of the children who qualify for free-and reduced-price school meals have access to a summer meal program. In addition to our USDA Summer Food Service Sponsorship launched in 2020 to meet the growing needs, Children’s Hunger Alliance also works with other sponsors to increase access to summer

meal programs offered at locations such as community centers, churches, schools and day camps.

USDA flexibilities such as non-congregate meal service i.e., a grab and go model and multi-day/multi-meal distribution had a tremendous impact on reducing summer childhood food insecurity. The chart included with my testimony was provided by No Kid Hungry/Share Our Strength and illustrates the impact of these provisions. **In the U.S., over 95 million meals were served in 2019, when these two flexibilities were not available and over 190 million in 2021 when they were. Ohio served approximately 1.8 million meals in 2019 and over 5.8 million meals in 2021. A staggering 4 million more meals were served in Ohio over the summer due to the availability of the non-congregate feeding model and multi-day/multi-meal distribution flexibilities.**



With the passage of the Omnibus spending bill in December of 2022, Congress allowed states to create a nationwide non-congregate option for summer meal programs in rural areas that do not have traditional congregate sites effective for the summer of 2024. The USDA recently provided additional guidance to states regarding the non-congregate option for this summer. ODE must submit a plan for Ohio to USDA by April 1, 2023, if it wishes to “opt in” for rural non-congregate feeding for the summer of 2023. We have been in touch with the appropriate ODE staff and will work with them to implement non-congregate feeding if a plan is submitted and approved for this year but prompt action and clear definitions relative to rural areas is required.

Finally, Children’s Hunger Alliance provides nutrition education and physical activity opportunities to children in an effort for them to learn about healthy food choices, stay active to help reduce the incidence of obesity, and to promote lifelong healthy habits. Our Nutrition Education Team of registered dietitians teach in-home childcare providers and childcare center operators how to plan nutritionally balanced meals that provide healthy food to the children in their care. We also offer nutrition education and physical activity programming in childcare centers, afterschool programs and at summer meal sites.

## **FY 24-25 Budget request**

The work we do at Children's Hunger Alliance to provide our most vulnerable citizens with one of their most basic needs - food - is critical for tens of thousands of Ohio children who depend on our services.

In order to sustain our work and be able to continue meeting the needs of food insecure children in our state, Children's Hunger Alliance is requesting \$7.5 million in state funding over the FY 24-25 biennium. This funding request represents an increase of \$5.15 million over the biennium relative to the Governor's introduced budget. This increase would allow CHA to sustain our current level of work annually providing over 9.5 million meals to children at risk of food insecurity. It would also allow us to expand our work of providing weekend meals to schools where we currently have 128 partners with another 29 schools on our waiting list. There is currently no federal program that supports weekend meals and we know that many children need this critical food safety net. The increased funding we are requesting, would allow CHA to expand its summer feeding sites, especially with Congress relaxing the USDA summer feeding rules to allow non-congregate sites in rural areas either the summer of 2023 or 2024 as noted above.

I want to thank Governor DeWine and his staff for recognizing the importance of our work and for including CHA in the introduced version of HB 33 (page 4052, lines 124074 through 124080) at a level of \$1.175 million per fiscal year out of 600689 TANF block grant dollars. While we greatly appreciate the Governor's support and inclusion of these earmarked dollars, due to the increasing need for our services, Children's Hunger Alliance respectfully requests that the House increase the TANF earmark to \$3,750,000 annually as outlined by the draft amendment HC0516 included in your packet.

We recognize that many worthy organizations are requesting funding in this budget cycle, but it is important to note that funding Children's Hunger Alliance represents an excellent return on investment for Ohio taxpayers. Our direct sponsorship work leveraged over \$20 million of federal nutrition funds back to Ohio in federal fiscal years 2021 and 2022. Additionally, our advocacy work with schools to increase breakfast participation and our support of summer meal sites directly increases the federal child nutrition funds they receive. We estimate that this would add another \$20 million of federal child nutrition funds bringing the total dollars leveraged to approximately \$40 million.

In conclusion, Children's Hunger Alliance plays a unique role in Ohio's hunger relief system. Receiving state funding would allow us to not only sustain our work but expand in key areas to provide vital services to address childhood hunger in high need areas throughout Ohio.

Chairwoman Carruthers and Subcommittee members, I thank you for your time and consideration of our funding request.

