

Chair Caruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and the rest of the HHS subcommittee, thank you for your time. My name is Diane Howard and I am one of the co-chairs of Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality. I'm also a senior citizen of Ohio who has lived and worked in this community for many many years. I have 21 grandchildren and 49 great grandchildren and raised four of my grandchildren myself, on top of my own children, while also working for all of my adult life. My youngest son Andre struggled with Multiple Sclerosis and my husband Daniel suffered from arterial heart disease, and I was the primary caretaker for both of them. It was very difficult but we managed to find a way. I was a nurse for many years until having to retire at the age of 49 due to my own health problems. I have always been a community activist and now serve as a precinct committee person for Ward 3A and as a commissioner for CMHA residents of Lakeview Terrace and Lakeview Towers. I was even nominated for Senior of the Year 2019 by Frank Jackson, our former mayor in Cleveland.

I introduce myself this way to say that not only have I been a model citizen of Ohio for many decades, but have gone above and beyond to make sure that when I was needed, I could step up to make sure every mouth was fed, not just in my own family but in the entire community. Why then, in my later years, should I be struggling to feed myself? Because I retired early due to health issues, I receive a fraction of the social security benefits that I should be eligible for. For a time, I only received \$16 a month in food assistance from SNAP, and while the current amount has raised to \$57, this is still not sufficient to cover my grocery bills during this time of serious inflation.

I do not consider these programs to be handouts, for me or for anyone else. These programs represent the choices we make as a society to protect our most vulnerable, whether that's senior citizens merely

trying to live comfortably after leaving the workforce, or people with serious disabilities who require help to attain a dignified quality of life. I should not have to take new jobs at 73 years old in order to maintain the same quality of life that I worked hard for years to provide to others. But increasingly, that expectation is being put on our elders and vulnerable citizens who are very rarely welcomed back into the workforce even when they return of their own volition. By guaranteeing dignified and secure lives for our elderly and other economically vulnerable citizens, we give the rest of our society the opportunity to grow and flourish as well. That is why these programs were started and why they remain essential many decades later. Food and shelter are only the most basic requirements of a dignified life, but even when it comes to those, our society and government has grown stingier and stingier.

Thankfully, there are things that Ohio legislators can do now to guarantee this dignity into the future. Participate in waiver programs so that food stamps are available for all non – senior adults without minor children who still meet the income requirements. Provide a state supported supplemental SNAP benefit for seniors and persons with disabilities of at least \$150 per month. And provide Universal Free School Meals for all children with additional state funding. Too many citizens of Ohio are one missed check away from hunger and homelessness. They are hardworking and creative individuals just like you and I, but they cannot reach for greater achievement if their basic needs are not being met. We have made the decision to turn people's basic needs into increasingly unaffordable commodities and the result has been crisis and stagnation, at the dinner table and in the greater economy. We now have a moral obligation to guarantee those basic needs so that all of us can thrive together. Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer questions.