



Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
Dan Flowers, President & CEO, Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank  
Director May 25, 2023  
Amended House Bill 33

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino and Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the state of hunger in Ohio.

My name is Dan Flowers and I represent the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, which serves Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas and Wayne counties in Northeast Ohio.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, our organization has served record numbers of individuals living in steadily worsening circumstances. At the same time, the food we need to help them has become harder and harder to find. Inflation is impacting people and the organizations that exist to serve them. Ohio's Foodbanks are in crisis. Meeting the surge in demand we are experiencing right now would require us to maintain an inventory of at least 2.5 million pounds of food. Today we have 900,000 pounds of food on the floor.

Comparing January – April 2023 to the same time last year, the Foodbank and our network of nearly 600 hunger-relief partners have experienced a 33% increase in individuals seeking help from local food pantries and a 40% increase in the number of visits to program sites. Of individuals visiting food pantries, 14% of the families were new, meaning they had never visited a food pantry within our network before. Many of these new visitors are seniors and older adults.

Samuel, 60, has been a hard worker his entire life. He worked in construction for more than 20 years before retiring. Unfortunately, he only enjoyed one year of retirement before being diagnosed with Lyme disease. A few years ago, he started visiting a food pantry for groceries. At first, he was timid to visit a pantry. Having worked all his life, he never found himself in need. But now, the pantry provides him with healthy, nourishing groceries that align with his dietary needs so he can sustain a fulfilling life.

Samuel shared, "Prices keep going up and up and up. This pantry really helps." Samuel's story is unfortunately common across our state. According to recent data from Feeding America, more than 300,000 older adults and seniors (50+) in Ohio experience food insecurity.

The breakdown of stability triggered by the pandemic has put the emergency food network in uncharted waters. We need help. We need YOUR help.

Our Foodbank humbly and passionately requests your consideration of the following amendments to HB 33. Support of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks amendment SC0437 will provide an additional \$10.45 million per year to support the purchase of 100 million pounds of food through the Ohio Food and

Agricultural Clearance programs from Ohio farmers, growers and commodity producers and to provide this food to food insecure and hungry Ohioans.

Amendment SC 0227 will provide a modest temporary minimum monthly benefit of just \$50 for up to 70,000 low-income seniors on SNAP, individuals whose benefits dropped from \$281 per month to \$23 per month when their pandemic-related emergency allotments expired after February 2023. Older Ohioans (age 60+) now make up nearly 1 in 4 of all food pantry visitors across Ohio. Visits to food pantries by older Ohioans increased by 107% over the decade leading up to the pandemic and have continued to accelerate. This amendment appropriates \$21,415,000 in each fiscal year in GRF ALI 600564, SNAP State Supplement. If this amendment keeps 329 seniors aging in place and at home, instead of going into a nursing home at a cost of \$65,000 per person, per year, the program becomes cost neutral.

Your support is vital to fighting hunger in Ohio and to protecting seniors' ability to age in their own homes with dignity. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Dan Flowers

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