



Greater Cleveland
Food Bank

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February 27, 2025

**Ohio House Children & Human Services Committee
Written Testimony on H. B. 96
Kristin Warzocha, President and CEO, Greater Cleveland Food Bank**

Chairwoman White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and distinguished members of the House Children & Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today regarding the critical funding needs of Ohio's food banks and the communities we serve. I am Kristin Warzocha, President and CEO of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank (GCFB), one of 12 food banks across the state who are dedicated to ensuring that every Ohioan has access to nutritious food in times of need.

First, I want to express my gratitude for your continued support of Ohio's food banks and emergency hunger relief programs. Your investment in these programs has provided life-changing assistance to individuals and families across our state. However, the need remains at historic levels making state support more critical than ever.

The Growing Need for Food Assistance

Families across Northeast Ohio are facing increasing hardship due to rising costs of living, as wages fail to keep pace with inflation and food costs have surged by 20% compared to four years ago. Many individuals who once managed to make ends meet are now finding themselves in need of emergency food assistance. In fact, over 100,000 people sought help from the Greater Cleveland Food Bank for the first time last year, highlighting the deepening crisis and expanding reach of food insecurity. As a result, not just the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, but food banks across Ohio and our thousands of food pantries, hot meal sites, and other emergency food partners have seen a dramatic surge in demand.



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In our last fiscal year, which ended in September 2024, nearly 425,000 Northeast Ohio children, seniors, working people, and families turned to the Greater Cleveland Food Bank and our network of over 1,000 partner agencies in six counties for help. This is significantly higher than before the pandemic when 300,000 individuals sought assistance annually. This past January, we served more people than in any other January in our organization's history—a sobering milestone that underscores the persistent and growing need for food assistance in our community.

While we are committed to serve those in need, our ability to meet this rising demand is increasingly strained. Inflation has reduced our purchasing power, making it more expensive to secure and distribute food. The end of ARPA funding that provided roughly \$20 million per year in nutritious food to Ohio's food bank network has only worsened the financial strain, while delays in the federal Farm Bill add further uncertainty.

Budget Request: A Needed Investment in Ohio's Communities

Over 20% of the food distributed by the Greater Cleveland Food Bank is purchased in bulk with state funding through Ohio Food and Ohio Agricultural Clearance programs. The majority of this food is purchased from Ohio farmers, at discounted rates to prevent food waste. It is a very effective public-private partnership and one the State of Ohio should be very proud of. Continued investment in these programs is vital to providing fresh, nutritious food to families, seniors, and children in need. Without adequate funding, we risk turning away those who depend on us for support.

With the need for food so high, state support is more critical than ever. On behalf of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank and the communities we serve, I respectfully ask this committee to support an additional \$12.43 million per year above the funding levels currently proposed in HB 98 for the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program. This funding would secure 58 million more pounds of food per year for Ohio food banks and our network of partners, helping to feed our neighbors facing hunger while supporting Ohio farmers and producers.

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Member of:



Local coordinator:





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This increase would provide \$36.98 million annually for food distributed across the state's food bank network, restoring funding to the current level of \$32.5M with a modest increase for inflation and rising demand. With millions of Ohioans facing higher costs for food, rent, and utilities, we anticipate continued high need over the next two years. We can't afford to lose millions of pounds of food at our food bank.

Chairwoman White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and committee members, we urge you to support this critical funding request. The challenges of rising food costs, increasing need, and uncertain federal support means that Ohio's families are counting on you. By restoring and increasing funding for Ohio's food banks, we can continue to provide a vital lifeline to those facing hunger.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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