



## Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

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Written Testimony on H.B. 96

February 27, 2025

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Chairwoman White, Vice Chairwoman Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and distinguished members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for your previous support and for the opportunity to provide testimony today on House Bill 96. As you begin your work on H.B. 96, I would like to provide additional context and information on the SE Ohio Foodbank, our more than 60 partner agencies, and the work being done to address food insecurity in our region. The SE Ohio Foodbank, a program of Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, assists individuals and families facing hunger in 10 rural counties in Southeast Ohio including Athens, Gallia, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Morgan, Perry, Vinton, and Washington.

Along with our 11 fellow foodbanks and the 3,600 partner agencies across the state of Ohio, we are respectfully requesting additional financial support for the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program to continue to provide the critical nutrition and supportive services for the Ohioans we assist. Not only has Ohio's hunger relief network provided take-home groceries for food insecure Ohioans for decades, but the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program have provided a secondary market for Ohio farmers, growers and producers to sell their unmarketable and surplus product, paying farmers and producers to harvest, pack, and send that product to be distributed through the Ohio hunger relief network. Local producers and farmers have shared that this allows them to avoid layoffs, keep their workers for longer, and support their local food system and community.

I wanted to share some local context on how the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program deeply impacts our community and our region. Southeast Ohio has some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the state, with one in six people experiencing food insecurity. That rate is higher for children at one in five. In 2024,





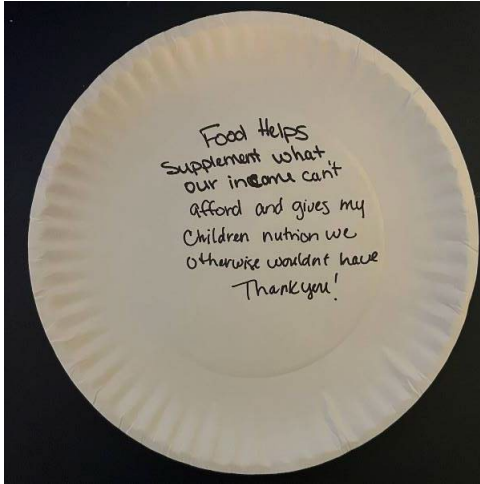
the Foodbank and our partner food pantries provided food assistance to 61,981 unduplicated individuals. Together, we provided the equivalent of 4.6 million meals. The Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program provided 702,136 of those meals.

Last year, we experienced a 30% increase in the number of individuals receiving assistance as compared to 2022, marking the highest number assisted in the past decade. There has been a notable rise in the number of seniors seeking assistance over the last two years. They have expressed that their fixed incomes can no longer meet their basic needs. Furthermore, many working families in our community have turned to our network for help. The employment opportunities available within our region tend to be predominantly in lower-wage sectors such as retail, home health, and food service. Unfortunately, the compensation provided by these positions often falls short of covering the basic necessities, including rent, utilities (such as water, electricity, and gas), prescriptions, and food, particularly in light of consistently high grocery prices.

It is important to emphasize that, on average, families utilize food pantries six times per year, in most cases receiving between three to five days' worth of food during each visit. The food assistance provided through the Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program is crucial for sustaining families during challenging economic times; still, many individuals come reluctantly to food pantries, apologizing as they walk through pantry doors because they have nowhere else to turn. Our region is home to hard working individuals who confront difficult economic circumstances, and with the assistance they receive from our network, they can better navigate these challenges.

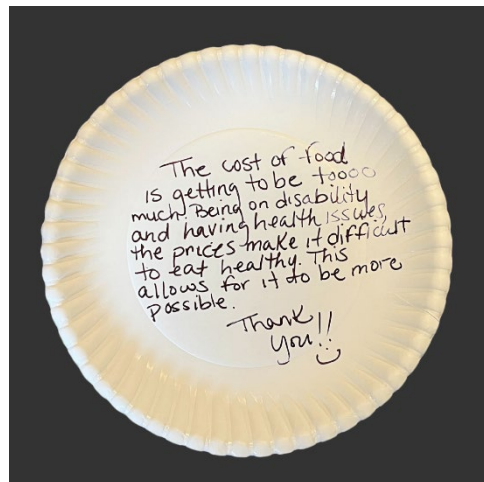
I would like to highlight some comments shared by individuals who have benefited from food assistance:

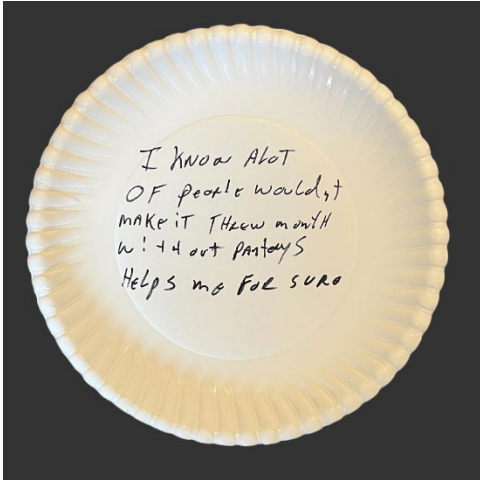




“Food helps supplement what our income can’t afford and gives my children nutrition we otherwise wouldn’t have. Thank you!”

“The cost of food is getting to be too much. Being on disability and having health issues the prices make it difficult to eat healthy. This allows it to be more possible. Thank you!”



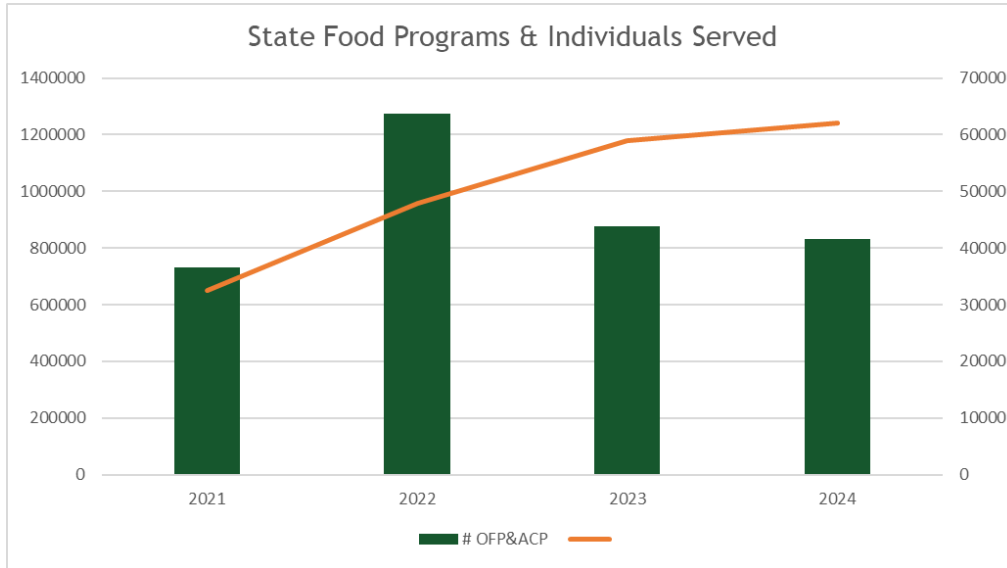


“I know a lot of people wouldn’t make it through the month without pantry’s help for sure.”

“These food events help my family make it through tough months with great programs like this families don’t have to go without. Thank you so much.”



Our regional network of partner pantries serves as the primary source of food distributed throughout the area where we operate. Member pantries often have small budgets and power their work through volunteers. They possess a deep understanding of the needs in their communities. A large majority have communicated to us that there is a pressing need for an increase in food supplies. Below is a chart that illustrates the volume of food provided by the Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program in relation to the rising demand for food assistance since 2021.



This chart reinforces what pantries have shared with us: more food is needed to supply families the healthy food they need.

Supporting a meaningful increase to the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program will allow Ohio’s local foodbanks and food pantries to continue to be the places Ohioans turn to when in crisis and will allow Ohio’s agricultural industry to remain strong. For our organization, it would mean that we would be able to keep our lights on, provide fresh, nutritious food to our community members, and support our local food system. It is an incredible investment not just for Southeast Ohio, but for the whole state.

Please consider including additional financial support for the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program in the state operating budget, H.B.96.

I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have upon reviewing my testimony.

With thanks,

Eva Bloom  
 Director of Development

