



Testimony for Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

Submitted by: Emmy Schroder, La Soupe, Executive Director

On Behalf of: La Soupe

Date: February 25, 2025

Subject: Funding Request for Food Security Programs in Ohio State Budget

Introduction

Chairwoman White and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Corinna Asbury and I am representing La Soupe, a Cincinnati-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing food insecurity by rescuing surplus food and transforming it into chef-prepared meals for those in need. Since our founding in 2015, we have rescued 6.5 million pounds of food, delivering 3.8 million servings of nutritious meals to individuals and families across Greater Cincinnati.

I am here to advocate for critical food security funding in the Ohio State Budget, particularly for independent community-based nonprofits like ours that operate locally to serve Ohio residents facing food insecurity. Investing in food security is not just a social responsibility, but also a strategic decision that boosts public health, improves educational outcomes, and lowers long-term healthcare and public safety costs. Additionally, food rescue initiatives offer significant financial savings by reducing food waste and redirecting surplus food to those in need, making it a cost-effective solution that benefits both communities, the environment, and local economies. The USDA estimates that annual food waste in America has an approximate value of \$161 billion dollars.

Budget Request Overview

La Soupe is respectfully requesting **\$3 million in state funding over two years (FY2026–FY2027)** to support and expand our core food security programs across Ohio. This funding will:

1. **Expand meal production and distribution in Cincinnati (\$700k)**
 - **140,000 chef-prepared meals** (at \$5 per meal) for Cincinnati residents in need. We have approximately 65 partner organizations who are on a wait list to receive our meals.
 - **Divert 3.4 million lbs of food from landfills to create** nutritious meals, reducing food waste while addressing hunger.
2. **Grow the Rescue Kitchen Network across Ohio (\$1.6M)**

- Support and guide the launch of **3 new rescue kitchens** (Hocking College, Cleveland Hunger Network, plus 1 more) across the state, providing critical empirical knowledge in addition to vital start-up capital and kitchen equipment.
 - Support capacity building **with existing Ohio food rescue kitchens** (Miami Valley Meals Dayton, Food Rescue Columbus, St. Tim's Perrysburg).
3. **Pilot Food as Medicine initiatives (\$195K)**
 - Launch a **medically tailored meal (MTM) intervention** for veterans with chronic diabetes in collaboration with the VA.
 - Partner with NourishedRx for **data tracking and nutrition counseling** to evaluate health outcomes and cost savings.
 4. **Expand nutrition education for families and students (\$228k)**
 - Provide **Give a Crock programming in 10 schools annually**, teaching middle schoolers how to cook healthy meals on a budget.
 5. **Administrative support (\$136k)**
 - Support standard nonprofit administrative costs (10% of budget).

Why This Matters for Ohio

The staggering amount of food wasted could be redirected to help address hunger, especially in a state like Ohio, where so many people, including children, are struggling with food insecurity. In Ohio, hunger is faced by 1 in 7 people and 1 in 5 children. Food insecurity is also a root cause of many social and economic challenges. Research confirms that hunger is linked to higher healthcare costs, increased violent crime rates, and lower educational outcomes. By funding community-based food programs like La Soupe, Ohio can proactively address these issues, reducing long-term public expenses while improving the well-being of residents.

Conclusion

We urge the Ohio legislature to allocate funding for food security programs that provide direct, measurable, long-term benefits within our communities. By supporting La Soupe's proposal in combination with other critical programs in the state that enhance food access, together, we can improve public health, community resiliency and strengthen economic stability for Ohioans in need.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions.