

Hunger Network in Ohio



Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, and Ranking Member Lett,

My name is Deacon Nick Bates and I am here today to speak in support of funding for Ohio's foodbanks and other investments to strengthen opportunities for hardworking Ohioans. The Hunger Network in Ohio (HNO) is a faith-based ministry working to end hunger by addressing the root causes of poverty in Ohio. Our network collaborates with congregations, food ministries, inter-faith partners, non-profits, and other community and social ministry organizations throughout Ohio.

The impacts of hunger and poverty Childhood poverty and hunger has long-term negative consequences on our population. The American Psychological Association finds, "living in poverty is associated with differences in structural and functional brain development in children and adolescents."¹ Simply put, children growing up in poverty are forced to operate under increased and unhealthy amounts of stress related to basic needs. This often leads kids to struggle with learning barriers, life-long health issues, and other hurdles to long-term economic stability and success. Addressing childhood hunger minimizes these negative outcomes.

According to Feeding America, "Older adults experiencing food insecurity can't always get the healthy food they need. This makes them more likely to have chronic health conditions like asthma and diabetes. They may also experience mental health problems like anxiety and depression."² Many older adults do not benefit as much from SNAP benefits, because of the impact of childcare expenses have on the calculations. Many older Ohioans, (about 70,000) 60 and older, only receive the minimum SNAP benefit of \$23 a month.³ Many of these individuals need more nutritious food but are foregoing nutrition to make sure their grandchildren are fed and their aging parents in their 80s and 90s are properly cared for. The lack of nutritious food for these seniors sets them on a path of increased healthcare expenses that will be carried by the taxpayer.

Hunger is going up in Ohio. The COVID-19 pandemic re-shaped our economy and the disruption has left many struggling in its wake. Ohio saw an 11.3% increase in the rate of food insecurity for Ohioans last year. (11.5% to 12.8%) and the U.S. saw an 8.9% increase (11.2% to 12.2%)⁴ in food insecurity. Not only is our food insecurity rate higher than the national average, we are increasing at a faster rate. While food-at-home prices only rose 1.2% last year, the impact of the

¹ May 2024, <https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children#:~:text=The%20impact%20of%20poverty%20on,due%20to%20local%20funding%20policies.>

² <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/senior-hunger-facts#:~:text=Effects%20of%20hunger%20on%20seniors,problems%20like%20anxiety%20and%20depression.>

³ https://ohiofoodbanks.org/site/assets/files/2933/aging_snap_-_hb428_4.pdf

⁴ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=109895>

5.0% inflation rate in 2023 on food-at-home, and 11.4% in 2022 have a lasting negative impact on our economy, especially for families in lower income brackets.⁵

Food Insecurity isn't the stereotype:

I have led youth groups, soccer teams, Scout groups, and helped with programs at our YMCA. I have interacted with hundreds of neighbors in my neighborhood who are working, volunteering and doing what they can to give their kids a good life and to strengthen our community. However, many of these families have confided in me that – at different times – they were struggling. They turn to food pantries. Sometimes, these temporary moments of food insecurity are solved within a month or two, sometimes food insecurity remains a cloud that overshadows the household month in and month out.

Foodbanks The Ohio Association of Foodbanks' 12-member food banks serve all 88 counties in Ohio, and is the backbone to our charitable response to hunger by supporting faith and community groups in accessing nutritious food to distribute to our communities. Church groups throughout Ohio talk about the impact of our system of food banks as loaves and fish. We often use the story from Mark 6 of Jesus feeding the 5,000 to illustrate how our collaboration with the food banks works. In the story, the Disciples were exhausted and went to a remote area to take a break. But when they arrived the crowds were there. As the hour grew late, the exhausted disciples whined to Jesus and wanted him to send all the people away. But "Jesus said, **you feed them.**" They thought they had no food, but were able to find a few loaves and fish. Miraculously, these were multiplied and all were fed.

It is the same with the Ohio Association of Food Banks. They perform miracles every day by purchasing from Ohio farmers, understanding logistics and nutrition. Our congregational food pantries and community meal programs rely on the expertise of the Foodbanks in our community to multiply our tiny loaves of bread and fish into enough to serve our communities.

In this budget we encourage you to fund the foodbanks at the FY 2025 levels and account for inflation. Specifically, The Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program were reduced by \$7.5 million per year in HB 96 and this funding should be restored as well as an additional \$4.93million million a year to respond to the inflationary pressures we are all see.

I have heard from multiple partners throughout the state that they are giving away less food than a year ago. I even heard last week that one monthly produce give away has to be cancelled because their foodbank just don't have enough. An additional loss of \$7.5 million a year will be devastating to an already hard reality.

I know the work of drafting a budget is exhausting, but like the Disciples of Jesus you are called to sacred work to feed our communities with not only food but the foundation for thriving neighborhoods that can make Ohio the best place to raise a family. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

⁵ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings>