



**Michelle M. Brown Children's Hunger Alliance FY26-27 Operating Budget
Proponent Testimony**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding our funding request in House Bill 96, in the FY26-27 State Operating Budget.

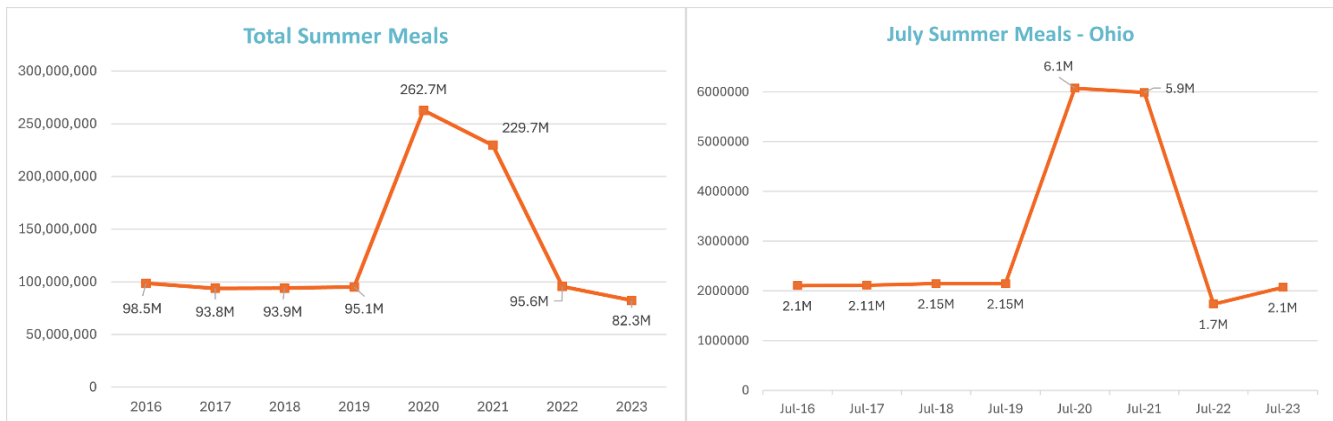
My name is Michelle Brown, and I am the CEO of Children's Hunger Alliance, a statewide non-profit founded in 1970, currently serving 76 counties in Ohio. Our mission is to increase food security and nutrition education for children across Ohio. What makes CHA unique is our ability to connect children to food right where they are: at in-home childcare providers, childcare centers, school, weekends, afterschool, and summer programs.

We work directly with 1,854 program partner sites in Ohio, ensuring kids have nourishing meals every day of the week. We partner and coordinate with food banks, as we know families additionally rely on their services to make ends meet. Even with each of our resources combined, as well as the SNAP and WIC programs, there is still a gap, and children bear the brunt of this issue, with 19.1% children food insecure compared to an overall rate of 14.1%. If a single mother is food insecure and she has three children, then the household food insecurity rate in that home is 3:1 children to adults.

Food insecurity negatively impacts a child's development, making it harder for them to learn and grow to reach their potential. Providing regular meals to children reduces chronic absenteeism, improves cognitive function, and ensures children are receiving the proper nutrients needed to grow.



Governor DeWine and the Ohio Legislature have helped us make progress in ensuring children's food security. In 2023, the total summer meals served across the U.S. was down by 13.3 million, but in Ohio, summer meals were up by 400,000 (ODEW). USDA flexibilities like the non-congregate meal service, a grab and go model, and the ability to provide multiple meals for multiple days at a time, are crucial in reducing childhood food insecurity during the summer months.



It takes a variety of funding support to get this work done. CHA raises funds from individuals, corporations and foundations and we bring federal dollars into the state through the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Support from the Ohio legislature is additionally critical to meet the needs of children in our state.

Through your generous support in the last operating budget, we were able to provide 10.8 million meals to 160,000 children across over 1,800 partner sites in FY24 alone, the largest impact in the organization's history.

I want to thank the Governor for including us in his proposed budget at our current funding level of \$7.5 million across the biennium (House Bill 96 as introduced, page 3769, lines 106685 through 106692).

While we greatly appreciate this support and inclusion of the TANF earmarked funds, we are asking for an \$1.5 million increase per year to meet the demand for



meals, specifically for our weekend meals program, which has tripled in size and faces a waitlist of over 80 sites. Our weekend meals program costs approximately \$50,000-\$100,000 per school each year. Last year, we also ran a successful produce pilot program, where we provided thousands of three-pound produce bags for children to take home during the week. There are no federal nutrition programs that cover these programs, so charitable support and state funding are critical for this work.

A&J Kiducation, located in Columbiana County, has been one of our stellar childcare partners since March 2021. Through CHA, the children receive nutritious meals daily, but many still face food insecurity on the weekends. One year ago, CHA began to support the center through our Weekend Meals Program. The children look forward to receiving their meal boxes at the end of each week, and the parents are very grateful! It also allows the center's owner, Jamie, peace of mind to know the children she loves and cares for as her own are receiving meals every day of the week!

A & J Kiducation is just one example of our 210 partners in this program.

With increased support, we also plan to expand our ability to provide nutrition education, ensuring children have the knowledge and food experience to eat well on a tight budget. Alongside a \$10.5 million TANF earmark, we will raise millions in private funds, and we will also bring in \$21 million in federal nutrition funds back to the state over the biennium.

CHA has a proven track record, over its 55-year history of strict compliance, efficiency and effectiveness in implementing programs. We have a 90% direct program expense to 10% admin ratio, and because we work all around the state, we are supporting small businesses such as in-home providers and childcare centers when they often have no one else in their area that can help them.



Chair Stewart and Committee members, I would respectfully request that you support the attached amendment (HC0483) sponsored by Representative John which would increase CHA's funding by \$1.5 million in each fiscal year of the biennium and add it to your list of priorities for the House substitute version of HB 96.

We are thankful for our continued partners, including the State of Ohio. Continued and increased state funding will allow us to continue to expand our reach until we can say that no child in Ohio goes hungry.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

HC0483

H. B. No. 96
As Introduced

_____ moved to amend as follows:

In line 106686, delete "\$3,750,000" and insert "\$5,250,000"

1

The motion was _____ agreed to.

SYNOPSIS

2

Department of Job and Family Services

3

Section 307.80

4

Increases the earmark in Fund 3V60 ALI 600689, TANF Block
Grant, for the Children's Hunger Alliance by \$1,500,000 in both
fiscal years.

5

6

7

Legislative Service Commission



hcl4flfofggatp35fhxgai