



My name is Deacon Nick Bates and I am here today to emphasize the impact of hunger in Ohio and three strategic efforts to reduce it 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 childhood 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.

Hunger is more than just children. 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 – the kind that is often purchased through the Ohio Food banks agricultural clearance program. The lack of nutritious food for these seniors sets them on a path of increased healthcare expenses that will be carried by the taxpayer over the long-term.

Hunger is going up in Ohio. 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 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: Right now, nearly 30% of Ohioans live below 200% of the federal poverty level⁶. These households are working but living right on the edge – one flat tire,

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

⁶ <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/population-up-to-200-fpl/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Under%20200%25%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

one broken furnace away from hunger. 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; they rely on school meals. Sometimes, these temporary moments of food insecurity are solved within a month or two, sometimes food insecurity remains a cloud that overshadows their household month in and month out.

To address hunger, we need to take multiple pragmatic steps:

First, we have to make sure families are fed today and the Ohio Association of Foodbanks is our leading charitable response to hunger. As I mentioned in my testimony before Children and human services, the food banks operate as a multiplier like Jesus with loaves and fish. We donate \$1.00 and through the efficiency and effectiveness of this program they turn it into \$10 worth of food. Please support restoring the foodbank funding by \$7.5 million and increasing the funding to account for inflation.

Second, we need to educate to end hunger.

Kids cannot learn on empty bellies. If food is a necessity for education, it should be provided for. The state pays to fill the tank on our busses to get kids to school, regardless of zip code. Let's make sure kids are fueled up for a day of learning. Fed kids are better able to focus, improving their own learning outcomes. I encourage you to read the stories and testimony of the 40 students who were in Columbus on March 4th on this issue⁷. Please support an expansion or the school meal program to make sure every child is fed.

Finally, we need to make sure families can meet basic needs.

The Governor's proposed child tax credit is targeted not only at low-income Ohioans but middle-class families as well who are just starting out. This tax credit, up to \$1,000 is well targeted for many families to help them meet their basic needs. Far too often, we know that when the budget gets tight, *the rent eats first*. And food insecurity seeps in. This child tax credit takes a major swing at this issue for young families. Please support the Child Tax Credit proposed by Governor DeWine.

In Closing, Faith communities, non-profits and others are working tirelessly to make sure our neighbors receive their daily bread. **But we cannot do it alone.** Through these three proposals, we can make a strategic and well-targeted impact to reduce hunger in Ohio and create the environment for families not only to survive day-to-day but to truly thrive.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

⁷ <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2025/03/05/ohio-students-plead-with-lawmakers-for-free-breakfast-and-lunch-in-schools/?emci=c4dedd46-01f9-ef11-90cd-0022482a9fb7&emdi=9ac6e2ff-b0f9-ef11-90cd-0022482a9fb7&ceid=140319>