

Ohio House Finance Committee Testimony

Chairman Stewart

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Joree Novotny

Executive Director, Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for your previous support and for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 96.

As executive director for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, I am here representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and their thousands of local food pantry, soup kitchen, shelter, and supplemental feeding partners across every County in Ohio.

I want to provide brief comment today in relation to food and nutrition security priorities in Sub. H.B. 96.

We are grateful for the investment of \$24.55 million per year in the state-funded food purchase programs that help us put fruits, vegetables, protein, dairy, and staple products on the shelves of nearly 2,000 local food pantries and 1,600 soup kitchens, shelters, and supplemental feeding sites.

This is equal to the level of core operating funding we received beginning in July 2019 with the passage of the 2020-2021 biennial budget, HB 166.

According to the USDA Economic Research Service, from 2020 to 2024, the all-food Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 23.6 percent.

Therefore, to maintain a level of core purchasing power close to what we had thanks to the support of the 133rd General Assembly prior to the onset of COVID-19, we have been seeking increased funding in Sub. H.B. 96.

We sought support for Amendment 0286, which would have provided \$36.98 million per year to procure healthy foods for statewide hunger relief while supporting Ohio's agricultural community.

However, we recognize that you have clearly communicated that resources are constrained and are moderating our request to you once more in recognition of those constraints. We are humbly urging support for an inflationary adjustment to this core funding level of \$4.93 million per year – this amount is less than the rate of increases to food prices impacting our purchasing power and consumer purchasing power. While it will not provide adequate food supply to deliver a comparable level of emergency hunger relief response compared to the level of response we have provided over the last decade, it will be meaningful and is vitally necessary to prevent hunger for vulnerable Ohioans and support Ohio agriculture.

We are simultaneously attempting to absorb the loss of millions of pounds of food from federal partners at USDA. We know that Ohio's elected officials do not want to see their constituents suffer from hunger, and your support for this modest adjustment will go directly

to purchasing healthy, wholesome foods and distributing them to people with limited resources across all 88 counties in Ohio.

Given that Amendment 0404, which would have supported upgrading Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) payment cards to protect innocent victims from benefit theft, was also not adopted, we will continue to be called upon to try to fill widening gaps left when vulnerable families and seniors are preyed upon, lose benefits for which they were eligible, and can no longer receive replacement benefits to buy the groceries they need. ODJFS and County JFS Offices are frequently referring victims of SNAP benefit theft to our network for help. We hope that support for this needed effort to mitigate harm for vulnerable families, as outlined in HB 163, is prioritized by the 136th GA.

Additionally, provisions added in Sub. H.B. 96 that would prohibit simplified reporting and require change reporting for SNAP participants would cause further erosion in access to this first-line nutrition safety net. County JFS offices are already struggling to meet federal timeliness requirements for processing applications and call center wait times are often hours long. As [outlined in a letter](#) just this week from FNS Acting Deputy Under Secretary John Walk, USDA is urging states to address unacceptable delays in applications and recertifications. Prohibiting simplified reporting for elderly and disabled households and requiring change reporting will worsen, rather than improve, access to SNAP for eligible Ohio households. This would ultimately force more people out of grocery store checkout lines and instead into our food pantry lines more often to feed their families, and we will not have adequate food supply to respond. We urge these provisions to be removed in the final omnibus bill.

In closing, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks and our members are prepared to continue to leverage 85,000 unduplicated volunteers that will contribute 360,000 volunteer hours valued at about \$10.5 million each year of the biennium and source an estimated 140 million pounds of donated and privately purchased foods valued at about \$220 million each year of the biennium. We provide a significant third-party maintenance of effort contribution to the State's overall investments in health and human services through leveraging these charitable contributions. I urge the committee and House leadership to support \$4.93 million per year in additional funding for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks core food purchase programs in its omnibus bill.

In closing, Chairman Stewart and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. On behalf of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, I would be pleased to answer any questions that members may have at this time.



Joree Novotny, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Foodbanks
100 E. Broad St. Suite 501 | Columbus, OH 43215
jnovotny@ohiofoodbanks.org | 614-273-5818