

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: _____

Name: _____

Are you representing: Yourself ☐ Organization ☐

Organization (If Applicable): _____

Position/Title: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Best Contact Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes ☐ No ☐

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): _____

Specific Issue: _____

Are you testifying as a: Proponent ☐ Opponent ☐ Interested Party ☐

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes ☐ No ☐

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? _____

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Dear members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Hunger is oftentimes referred to as the silent crisis because not only are people embarrassed to share their struggle of feeding themselves, but also because its devastating impacts go unnoticed by those directly affected. This is especially true on college campuses, where students quietly battle food insecurity while trying to keep up with academic and personal demands. I support House Bill 157, which is commonly known as the Hunger-Free Campus Act, because it is a step in the right direction in ensuring that the future of America is empowered to thrive academically, physically, and mentally through access to consistent and nutritious meals on college campuses.

As proven by a study in Health Affairs, food insecurity significantly harms college students, leading to lower GPAs, poor attendance, increased stress and depression, and unhealthy eating habits like the choice of cheaper, highly processed foods that contribute to the overconsumption of added sugars, refined grains, and added fats. These behaviors pose long-term health risks like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, which places a burden on the U.S. healthcare system and limits the potential of millions of Americans.

This national issue is especially prevalent on college campuses across Ohio. In the college I attend, Case Western Reserve University, a survey conducted just last year reported 31.56% of respondents being food insecure, which is approximately 3,900 students. At the renowned Ohio State University, the most populous university in Ohio, a 2024 survey showed $\frac{1}{3}$ of the student body is food insecure, meaning a concerning 22,300 students have trouble accessing nutritious meals. How can we expect our future leaders to thrive when their basic needs, like access to nutritious food, are not being met?

There are many other colleges and students across Ohio who suffer from the lack of food. Given the expenses of paying for college tuition, textbooks, housing, and other necessities, many students are forced to make difficult choices between their education and basic needs, such as food. While I have not personally experienced food insecurity, I know people who are and have seen the pain of going hungry. Everybody can agree that food should not be a hindrance to our education, and no college student should have to sacrifice their well-being to pay for other expenses.

This thinking has been recognized in this Congress and in the state of Ohio. In House Bill 33 during the 135th General Assembly under Section 3313.819, this Congress has recognized the importance of feeding our future by providing students eligible for a reduced-price breakfast a breakfast at no cost in public schools. Additionally, Governor DeWine signed an executive order granting up to three hundred thousand dollars to assist the Ohio Association of Foodbanks in providing summertime food assistance to eligible children, adding to the other food-related executive orders he has already signed. Both of these actions are incredible, but exclude our college students, the people who arguably need the support the most. I know the \$650,000 cost seems like a lot, but it is an investment in a healthier, more educated workforce and a stronger future for Ohio. It has already been proven that students who are food secure perform better academically, are more engaged in their studies, and are less likely to drop out. By addressing food insecurity now, we are setting the foundation for a generation of students who can focus on their studies, excel in their careers, and contribute to the economic and social well-being of our state.

Finally, the Hunger-Free Campus Bill, already passed in 11 states, has provided considerable results. In Louisiana, the Louisiana Delta Community College used their grant funds to create six food-to-go pantries, and in Pennsylvania, Manor College established a community garden to offer fresh vegetables to the student body. This bill has successfully reduced student hunger in other states and will do the same in Ohio.

I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to the members of this Committee for taking the time to read this letter and my support for House Bill 157. I truly appreciate your consideration of this important issue and your commitment to creating a healthier and brighter future for all students in Ohio.

Best regards,

Umair Vaseemuddin

Case Western Reserve University Undergraduate Student

Class of '28