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May 20, 2025

Ohio House Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB157

Sarah Kuhns, External Affairs Manager, Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Chairman Young, Vice Chairman Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Workforce & Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB157, the Hunger Free Campus Act. I want to thank both Representatives Brennan and Hoops for introducing this legislation to support Ohio's future workforce.

My name is Sarah Kuhns and I serve as external affairs manager at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. The association represents Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,600 faith and community-based partner agencies and programs, such as soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters and supplemental feeding sites across all 88 counties in Ohio. Our network of foodbanks has been proud to work with more than 30 of our state's institutions of higher education to establish food pantries on site or provide direct food distributions for students struggling with food insecurity, including Wright State University, Ohio University, and The Ohio State University. In my written testimony, you will find an appendix of the current map of colleges and universities our network supports. These local partnerships have developed organically over the years to provide the support needed based on the type of institution and the makeup of the students that attend these schools. Throughout our network's engagement on the issue of college student hunger, it has been clear that the approach has been patchwork, leading institutions to establish basic needs programs only if they have the connections, the will and the funds to do so. In my experience, many colleges, especially smaller and less resourced institutions, must rely on the generosity of their alumni and community and the good will and passion of a dedicated staff member to support their food pantry or other basic needs program.

If passed, the Hunger Free Campus Act would incentivize colleges and universities to establish basic needs programs, like an on-site food pantry or emergency assistance grant program as well as connecting students to resources. These incentives would make it easier for smaller and less resourced institutions to establish and adjust these programs to better serve the needs of their student body. Institutions of higher education increasingly know and understand that when students are unable to meet their basic needs while obtaining their



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degree, they are more likely to struggle in class, take longer to complete their degree, or even drop out. Post-secondary education [leads to higher paying careers](#), less dependency on government programs, and better health outcomes long term.

As you consider this bill, I wanted to share a few examples of how the Hunger Free Campus Act, if enacted, will help meet critical needs on college campuses. While our team has met with higher education institutions to understand the college student basic needs landscape in Ohio, we learned that many universities do not have the infrastructure needed in their pantries to store food, especially fresh produce, dairy, and lean meats. Many also expressed an interest in providing microwaves, stoves and cooking utensils near the pantry so students who were commuting to school or even living in dorms with limited access to a kitchen could cook the items they received at the pantry. We were even told by one food pantry coordinator that if they were able to receive a Hunger Free Campus grant, they would use it to simply invest in a microwave and refrigerator.

While many college pantries really find value in partnering with their local foodbank to receive healthy, local food for their students, we are not always the best solution for their needs. Some colleges opt to self-fund their pantries because they are not always able to afford a staff member or student worker to manage eligibility intake after hours or over the weekend, which restricts their ability to distribute means-tested state and federal commodities that require an eligibility intake process. Because they want the food pantry to be available when students need food or even a place to cook, which can happen on weekends or nights, some campuses decide to purchase food on their own or ask for donations through their alumni network or from their community. Other campuses may decide to purchase food that they cannot get through their local foodbank, like convenience foods and foods that come in single servings that many students living on campus must rely on given their limited access to a kitchen. These foods are usually more expensive, making it difficult to truly invest in the infrastructure that is needed for the pantry.

If a campus does not have a pantry or basic needs program, this requires the student to try to find a way to leave campus and connect with a local community-based organization. Not all students have transportation available to be able to leave campus and not all college towns have access to other community-based organizations, especially those in more isolated and rural areas of the state.



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This bill will also provide the state with better data and information on what resources exist at each institution supported by this grant, providing best practices for other similarly positioned institutions and opening the door for more opportunities to coordinate information sharing among institutions and the state. In our experience, many colleges and universities did not know what support or programs were available to them as they were establishing their own basic needs programs and expressed a desire to be more connected and less siloed as they are just getting started, not just with similarly positioned institutions, but also with local community-based organizations and the state.

If passed, Ohio would join states like Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania in acknowledging that more can be done for our college students and future generation of workers. The Hunger Free Campus Act (HB157) is a strong step in providing additional resources to institutions and establishing basic needs programs on campuses that best serve the needs of the students and the school community. On behalf of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks and our hunger relief network, I urge you to support HB157, the Hunger Free Campus Act, and pass it out of committee. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Sarah Kuhns

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APPENDIX: Campuses Served by the Ohio Foodbank Network



Foodbanks & Campuses Served

Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio

BGSU - Firelands College, Lorain County Community College: Commodore's Cupboard Food Pantry via Lorain County Community College Foundation

Greater Cleveland Foodbank

Cuyahoga Community College: 3 locations, Cleveland State University, Baldwin Wallace, Case Western Reserve University, Lakeland Community

Second Harvest Foodbank of the Mahoning Valley

Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank

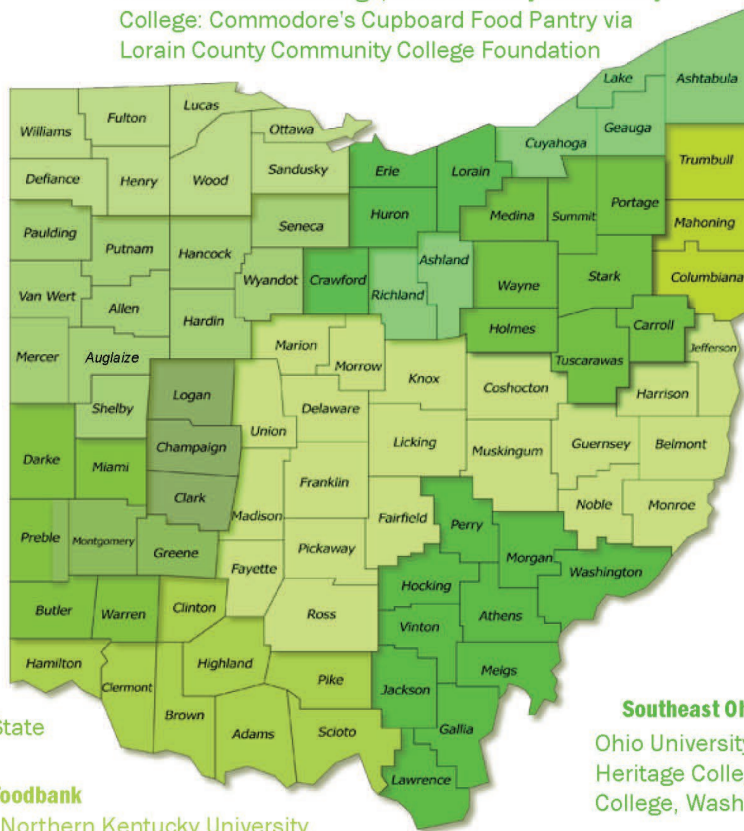
Kent State University, NEOMED, University of Akron: Main & Stark Campus

Mid-Ohio Food Collective

OSU Buckeye Pantry, Mid-Ohio Market at Columbus State

Southeast Ohio Foodbank & Kitchen

Ohio University: the Cats Cupboard and the Heritage College Pantry, Collins Technical College, Washington State College of Ohio



Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank Inc.

Bowling Green State University, The University of Toledo

West Ohio Food Bank

The Ohio State University Lima Branch: School Pantry

Second Harvest Food Bank of Clark, Champaign and Logan Counties

Clark State

Shared Harvest Foodbank

Miami University

The Foodbank, Inc.

Sinclair Community College, Wright State U. Wilberforce/Central State Main Campus

Freestore Foodbank

University of Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky University, Xavier University, Mt. Saint Joseph University, Gateway Community & Technical College, Cincinnati State University