



**HB 96 – Testimony
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Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the SNAP purchase restrictions language relative to House Bill 96.

As President of the Ohio Grocers Association, I proudly represent food retail, wholesale and supply companies across the Buckeye state. My members include the smallest “mom and pop” stores, independent grocers as well as some convenience stores and of course the food wholesalers who supply these stores. Ohio’s independent community grocers contribute over \$13 billion dollars in sales, over 53,000 direct jobs and \$1.5 billion in direct wages, as well as over \$1.5 billion in total taxes.

SNAP is the largest federal nutrition program providing benefits to tens of millions of Americans every year. Grocery stores are a critical partner in this program as SNAP benefits can only be redeemed at SNAP-authorized retailers like grocery stores. The SNAP program works because it’s simple, efficient and respects hardworking Ohioans who need additional support to get back on their feet. Restricting choice and options for SNAP recipients will not make Ohioans healthier or save taxpayer dollars, but will add burdensome regulations and government red tape, ultimately harming our state’s grocers and our food and beverage suppliers.

SNAP purchase restrictions would force OGA members to review over 600,000 food products; that doesn’t include the thousands of new ones that hit store shelves every year. The administrative burden alone would be devastating while increasing the regulatory impact for our small independent grocers. Our stores would have to update their systems for over 20,000 items in each store. With an average profit margin of 1.5%, ultimately those costs would be passed down to the consumer. Furthermore, our front-line cashiers would turn into food police and open themselves up to unwanted, unnecessary confrontations created by government bureaucrats.

We applaud the General Assembly in cutting red tape and making Ohio a great place to do business in. However, if the state enacts SNAP purchase restrictions, we will put

Ohio on an island in a federal program, one that will create a patchwork of state-by-state laws. Since the SNAP program is a federal program, recipients are allowed to use their benefits across state lines. Do we want to create a scenario where SNAP recipients are crossing into Michigan or Pennsylvania to use their benefits?

Lastly, purchase restrictions will move SNAP down the path to become WIC (Women, Infants, Children), a program designed specifically for moms and babies, but vastly different from SNAP. By comparison, SNAP is available at nearly 10,000 retail locations in Ohio - WIC, at roughly 1,200. WIC works because moms get a personalized nutrition plan. Applying those same perimeters to the SNAP program will be an administrative nightmare and the cost to taxpayers would be enormous. Restricting SNAP will lead stores to leave the program in masses, meaning less access for families, especially in rural Ohio.

We urge the committee and Senate members to weigh these considerations as you deliberate on the operating budget. OGA members want to be a part of the solution and urge lawmakers to focus on free market approaches that expand access for healthier alternatives. Purchase restrictions miss the mark and ultimately will harm Ohio's robust food supply chain.

Thank you for your time and consideration.