



Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson,

My name is Deacon Nick Bates, and I am called to serve as the director of the Hunger Network in Ohio – a statewide ministry that works to end hunger by addressing the root causes of poverty.

We have that opportunity every two years to create a plan to solve big problems. Right now, in Ohio some of the most pressing concerns for everyday Ohioans are pretty well known – rising grocery prices and housing costs, high costs and a lack of affordable childcare, and local schools that are struggling to have the resources to address all of the needs of our communities.

As a person of faith, showing love to my neighbor is always top priority especially the hungry, the outcast, the widow, the marginalized neighbor. In this budget we can adopt specific policies that are smart public policy to achieve these goals.

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%)¹ in food insecurity. Not only is our food insecurity rate higher than the national average, we are increasing at a faster rate. Linger high inflation rates continue to cause stress and hardship for low- and middle-income families alike. While Food-at-home prices only rose 1.2% last year in 2024, the impact of the 5.0% inflation rate in 2023 on food-at-home prices, and 11.4% in 2022 have a lasting negative impact on our economy and food security.²

I want to emphasize food Insecurity isn't the stereotype: Right now, nearly 30% of Ohioans live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level³. These households are working but living right on the edge – one flat tire, 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 have struggled. 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.

There are no one-sized fits all approaches to ending hunger and poverty. It requires multiple intentional steps and collaborations to achieve the goal. There are many important policy proposals to consider including Medicaid, lead abatement, childcare, and senior services. I will

¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=109895>

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings>

³ <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>

uplift five specific proposals that our network has identified in addition to many other important priorities.

1. **Invest in the Ohio Association of Foodbanks (SC0628).** Hunger has increased in Ohio. Food costs more. Expenses are going up compared to the budget passed in 2019. The food banks support our local congregational food pantries with fresh fruits and vegetables and other important items. Your investment into the foodbanks provides nutritious food to those who need it most while supporting Ohio farmers. This nutritious food will reduce negative health outcomes for children, seniors, and others.
2. **Keep SNAP effective and Efficient:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the front lines against hunger. Policy changes proposed by the House such as change reporting will discourage workers from picking up extra shifts, because small week-to-week adjustments in pay could cost the household more in SNAP benefits than they will receive in additional pay, creating a new benefits cliff. Six months in between reporting periods allows Ohio to account for seasonal employment variations. Monthly reporting will also create massive amount of additional bureaucracy that will bury our county workers in paperwork – preventing them from serving their clients. The changes also lock Ohio into a one-sized fits all federally dictated approach to SNAP in Ohio and prevents us from adopting our plans to fit Ohio best.
3. **Protect the Housing Trust Fund (SC 0900):** For two decades, Ohio has utilized the Ohio Housing Trust Fund to address housing insecurity throughout the state. These are NOT general revenue dollars. Faith-based housing and homeless services, like Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry in Cleveland and Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio, utilize the trust fund to serve our neighbors. In 2020-2021, the Trust Fund invested \$45 million into serving our neighbors and effectively leveraged \$167 million in other investments to reduce homelessness, improve homes, and strengthen communities⁴ through locally crafted plans.
4. **Invest in young families (Amendment: SC 0572):** The Governor’s proposed Child Tax Credit is a smart investment into hardworking families struggling to pay for child care and other expenses when just starting out. It is hard to raise kids today. The costs of childcare, balancing work and taking time off to get kids to all those wellness checks and when they are home sick. Kids are likely to get sick with minor infection 10-12 times a year when young and in childcare.⁵ This means days off work and missed wages. This tax credit – as proposed by Governor DeWine – will help some families keep food on the table and gain a little economic footing that will support them for years to come.
5. **Strengthen our public schools:** To end hunger in the long-term, kids need to be equipped with the right tools and skills to be successful in the economy of tomorrow.

⁴ <https://ohiohome.org/news/documents/OHTF-FactSheet.pdf>

⁵ <https://share.upmc.com/2023/05/daycare-syndrome/#:~:text=My%20Child%20Gets%20Sick%20Every,kids%20ages%20six%20and%20above.>

Investments into efforts to expand school meals to 225% of the federal poverty level. The Fair School Funding Plan created a framework to answer the questions how much should a well-rounded education cost and how can we make sure it is funded fairly between rural, urban, suburban communities. Part of the Fair School Funding Plan looks at the investments we need to make to help students overcome external social factors, such as needing to learn English, poverty, homelessness and much more. One aspect that should be considered as well is nutrition. Good nutrition fuels our students to learn. We recommend that the state build on the success of the school breakfast and lunch program by expanding eligibility to 225% of the federal poverty level from the current 185% while restoring the Fair School Funding Plan.

Ohio can solve big problems when we come together. **Our faith-based charity is important but is no replacement for a public commitment to address these needs.** Ohio families are working hard and barely keeping their heads above water. By prioritizing a budget that reflects the values and morals of Ohioans, we can reduce hunger, strengthen our communities, and guarantee that Ohio is the best place to raise a family.

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