



Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Written Testimony on H.B. 96

May 27, 2025

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Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 96. As you continue your work on H.B. 96, I would like to provide additional context and information on the SE Ohio Foodbank, our more than 60 partner agencies, and the work being done to address food insecurity in our region.

The SE Ohio Foodbank, a program of Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, assists individuals and families facing hunger in ten rural counties in Southeast Ohio—Athens, Gallia, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Morgan, Perry, Vinton, and Washington. Our mission is to ensure that every neighbor in our region has consistent access to nutritious food while building pathways to greater economic stability and improved health. By working with partner food pantries and meal providers, we serve as a regional hub for donated, government, and purchased foods and for wrap-around services that help families move toward self-sufficiency.

Along with our eleven fellow foodbanks and the 3,600 partner agencies across the state of Ohio, we are respectfully requesting an additional \$4.93 million per year through the Ohio Food Program (OFP) and Agriculture Clearance Program (ACP)—for a total investment of \$29.48 million per fiscal year—to continue providing the critical nutrition and supportive services Ohioans need to maintain their health and wellbeing. Beyond supplying take-home groceries for food-insecure households, OFP and ACP create a secondary market for Ohio farmers, growers, and producers to sell unmarketable or surplus product. By paying producers to harvest, pack, and ship that food through the hunger-relief network, the programs help farmers avoid layoffs, keep employees working longer into the season, and strengthen local food systems.

The Foodbank and our partner food pantries provided food assistance to 61,981





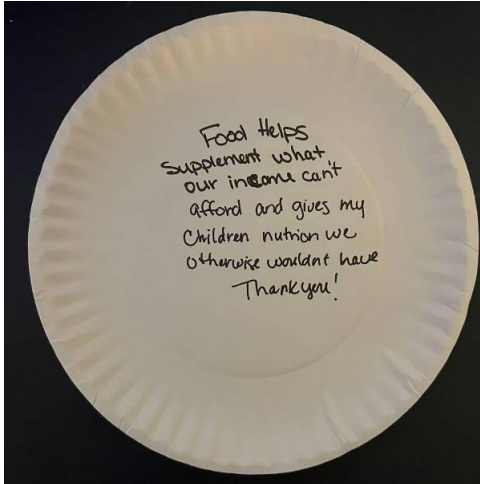
unduplicated individuals. Together, we provided the equivalent of 4.6 million meals. The Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program provided 702,136 of those meals.

Since 2022, we have experienced a 30% increase in the number of individuals receiving assistance. Last year, we assisted more individuals than any year in the past decade. There has been a notable rise in the number of seniors seeking assistance over the last two years. They have expressed that their fixed incomes can no longer meet their basic needs. Furthermore, many working families in our community have turned to our network for help. The employment opportunities available within our region tend to be predominantly in lower-wage sectors such as retail, home health, and food service. Unfortunately, the compensation provided by these positions often falls short of covering the basic necessities, including rent, utilities (such as water, electricity, and gas), prescriptions, and food, particularly in light of consistently high grocery prices.

It is important to emphasize that, on average, families utilize food pantries six times per year, in most cases receiving between three to five days' worth of food during each visit. The food assistance provided through the Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program is crucial for sustaining families during challenging economic times. Still, many individuals come reluctantly to food pantries, apologizing as they walk through pantry doors because they have nowhere else to turn. Our region is home to hard-working individuals who confront difficult economic circumstances, and with the assistance they receive from our network, they can better navigate these challenges.

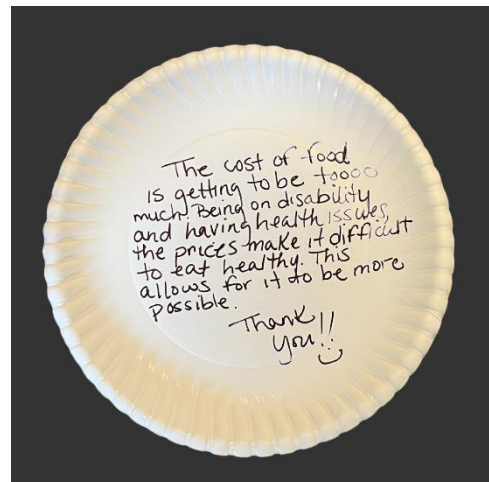
I would like to highlight some comments shared by individuals who have benefited from food assistance:

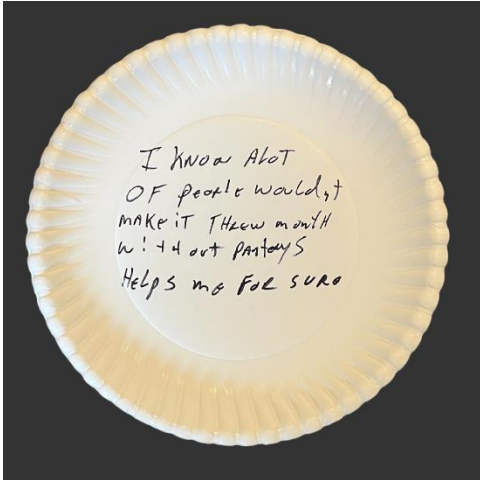




"Food helps supplement what our income can't afford and gives my children nutrition we otherwise wouldn't have. Thank you!"

"The cost of food is getting to be too much. Being on disability and having health issues the prices make it difficult to eat healthy. This allows it to be more possible. Thank you!"



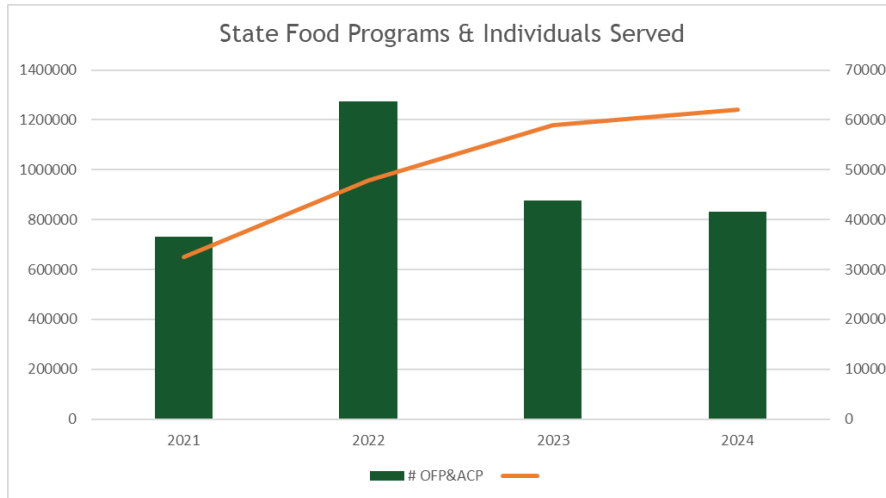


"I know a lot of people wouldn't make it through the month without pantry's help for sure."

"These food events help my family make it through tough months with great programs like this families don't have to go without. Thank you so much."



Our regional network of partner pantries serves as the primary source of food distributed throughout the area where we operate. Member pantries often have small budgets and power their work through volunteers. They possess a deep understanding of the needs in their communities. A large majority have communicated to us that there is a pressing need for an increase in food supplies. Below is a chart that illustrates the volume of food provided by the Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program in relation to the rising demand for food assistance since 2021.



This chart reinforces what pantries have shared with us: more food is needed to supply families with the nutrition they need.

Supporting a meaningful increase to the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program will allow Ohio's local foodbanks and food pantries to continue to be the places Ohioans turn to when in crisis and will allow Ohio's agricultural industry to remain strong. For our organization, it would mean that we would be able to keep our lights on, provide fresh, nutritious food to our community members, and support our local food system. It is an incredible investment not just for Southeast Ohio, but for the whole state.

Please consider including additional financial support for the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance Program in the state operating budget, Amended Substitute HB96.

I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have upon reviewing my testimony.

With thanks,

Eva Bloom
Director of Development

