



**Greater Cleveland
Food Bank**

GreaterClevelandFoodBank.org

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Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Written Testimony on H.B. 96

Kristin Warzocha, President & CEO, Greater Cleveland Food Bank

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 House Bill 96. As you continue your thoughtful work on this budget, I appreciate the chance to share additional insight on the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, our network of more than 1,000 partner programs, and the ongoing effort to address food insecurity across our service area—including Cuyahoga, Ashland, Ashtabula, Lake, Geauga, and Richland Counties.

The mission of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank is to ensure that everyone in our communities has the nutritious food they need every day. In FY2024, we served more than 424,000 individuals—including nearly one in four seeking assistance for the first time. This is a clear reflection of continued economic hardship, elevated food prices, and the pressure many families, seniors, and working individuals are experiencing. We are seeing working families whose income is simply not keeping up with rising expenses, and senior citizens who can no longer stretch their social security checks far enough to make ends meet.

Alongside our 12 fellow food banks and 3,600 partner agencies across Ohio, we respectfully request an additional \$4.93 million per year for the Ohio Food Program (OFP) and Agricultural Clearance Program (ACP), bringing total annual support to \$29.48 million. While this is a decrease from the \$32 million in current funding, we understand that there are budget challenges this year and it would still make a meaningful difference. These programs are essential—not only for ensuring food reaches Ohioans in need, but also for sustaining the state’s agricultural economy by purchasing surplus and unmarketable products from local farmers and producers. That investment helps preserve jobs, strengthen rural communities, and support our local food system.

Local Impact and Ongoing Need

In FY2024, support from the OFP and ACP programs enabled the Greater Cleveland Food Bank to distribute approximately 13.1 million pounds of food—the equivalent of 10.9 million meals—throughout Northeast Ohio. Under current funding proposals, this would fall to just 7.7 million pounds or 6.4 million meals by FY2026—a loss of 5.4 million pounds, or 4.5 million meals, compared to this year. At a time of record high need, this would be devastating for our partners and the neighbors we all serve.

This return to 2019 funding levels would be felt across every part of our six-county region. We work hand-in-hand with over 1,000 local partners—schools, senior centers, shelters, veteran organizations, and faith-based food pantries, including those in rural communities—to ensure

Partner Distribution Hub @ Coit Road
13815 Coit Road
Cleveland, OH 44110
216.738.2265

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food reaches those who need it most. With fewer resources available, our partner agencies would face impossible choices about how to stretch food supplies, limit distributions, or serve fewer people.

Demand remains high. In FY2024, we served nearly 120,000 more people than in FY2019. At the same time, food prices are 24% higher than in 2019—meaning every dollar buys less, both for families and for food banks working to make limited resources go further.

While we're fortunate to have strong community and private support—including millions of pounds in donated food from local retailers and more than 16,000 volunteer contributing 108,000 hours of service in FY2024—without sustained public investment, we may be forced to make difficult operational decisions.

Programs like OFP and ACP are particularly valuable because of the high-quality, healthy food they provide. Fresh produce, dairy, and proteins are among the most requested items we distribute, and our neighbors consistently share how meaningful it is to receive fresh nutritious food for themselves and their families.

Beyond Food: Investing in Stability

At the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, we believe food is just the beginning. Through our on-site Community Resource Center (CRC), we connect individuals to workforce development opportunities, re-entry services, health screenings, housing support, and other wraparound programs that address the root causes of food insecurity. These services help people move from crisis to stability—and ultimately toward long-term self-sufficiency.

However, reduced food resources could limit our ability to provide these critical services that, over time, reduce demand and strengthen the economic stability of the neighbors we serve. A strong investment in food assistance not only ensures people can eat today—it creates the foundation for healthier, more resilient communities tomorrow.

Conclusion

Bringing the State's investment closer to current funding for the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program will allow Ohio's food banks and pantries to remain community anchors during times of crisis, while reinforcing the state's agricultural economy and improving public health. For the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, and our 1,000 program partners in six counties, it would mean continuing to provide fresh, nutritious food, maintaining our partnerships with Ohio's farmers and producers, and meeting rising demand from seniors and working families without compromising quality or reach.

With appreciation,

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President & CEO

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