



Testimony of Erin West, Executive Director
House Bill 96 – State Operating Budget
Senate Finance Committee
June 5th, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on House Bill 96 and the importance of supporting food pantries and food banks. My name is Erin West, and I am the Executive Director of Hilliard Food Pantry Plus, proudly serving families here in Franklin County.

At Hilliard Food Pantry Plus, we are committed to strengthening families and promoting self-sufficiency in our community. Since our founding in 1963, we have grown from a traditional food pantry into a comprehensive community resource hub. We are more than a food pantry and that's why we added "Plus" to our name! In 2024 alone, we served nearly 4,000 families, in Hilliard and surrounding neighborhoods.

Two years ago, through House Bill 33, we received our first-ever TANF allocation of \$75,000 per fiscal year. This funding enabled us to expand services allowing us to support families in working toward long-term self-sufficiency.

These programs meet families where they are, addressing urgent needs while building pathways to independence. Through care coordination, we connect families to utility assistance, housing referrals, job training, and crisis support. Ultimately, helping parents navigate complex systems, strengthen family bonds, and avoid instability.

Our *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World* classes, built on the *Bridges Out of Poverty* framework, empower families to examine the barriers that keep them in poverty and develop practical strategies for change. Participants gain the tools and confidence to pursue their goals—whether that's securing a stable home, getting steady employment, or seeking higher education.

TANF funding has been critical to our mission, and we respectfully request that the Ohio Senate continue and expand this support to \$100,000 per fiscal year. This investment aligns with TANF's core goals of family stability, economic self-sufficiency, and child well-being. With these resources, we can continue to provide holistic services that change thousands of lives and help lift families out of poverty.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to the State of Ohio. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.