

Testimony to the Ohio House of Representatives Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

April 10, 2019

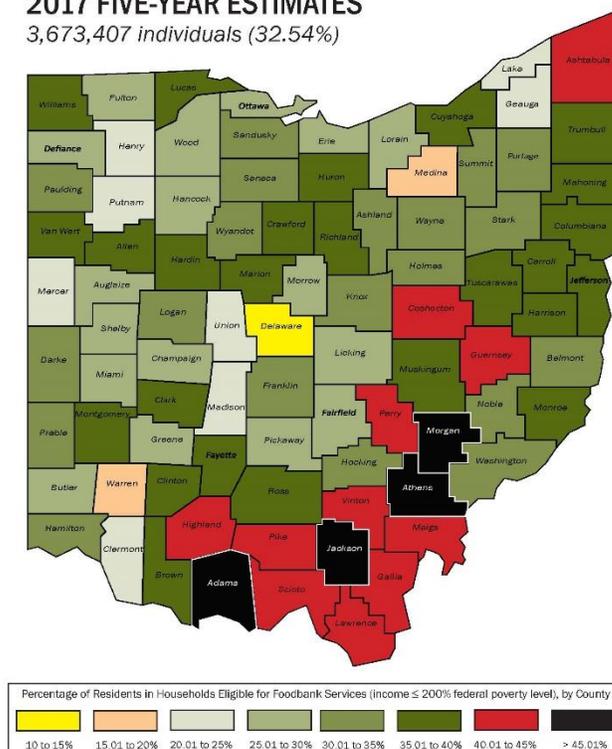
Testimony from Lisa Hamler-Fugitt Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Good morning Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee of the House Finance Committee. I am Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger.

I am very honored to be here to share with you the efforts of our 12 foodbanks, who provide food, funding, training and critical resources to more than 3,500 hunger relief agencies and programs.¹ We support food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and site-based programs like: pantries at K-12 schools, community colleges, and four-year universities; food distribution at low-income senior housing complexes; and special nutrition screening and support at community and hospital health clinics. Since the last state budget our foodbanks have expanded services to a historic number of non-profit and faith-based agencies. Unfortunately, while individuals and corporations give generously, donated food and funding hasn't kept up to meet this increased demand for help with food, personal care, hygiene, and household items, meaning we are rationing resources.

We know that hunger is a symptom of poverty. The reasons for continued high levels of food insecurity are multifaceted, including the widening income gap. More low-wage workers don't earn enough to make ends meet, especially with increasing housing and health care costs, so they find themselves standing in longer food lines today. These lines are also filled with more seniors living on low, fixed incomes. In fact, we've seen a 25 percent increase in seniors at our food pantries in just the past four years. Sixteen percent of these seniors report that they are responsible for the care of their grandchildren –these families are really the silent victims of a radically changing economy and the crippling effects of raging drug and mass incarceration epidemics.

2017 FIVE-YEAR ESTIMATES
3,673,407 individuals (32.54%)



¹ http://ohiofoodbanks.org/docs/publications/SFY2018_annual_report.pdf

Today in Ohio:

- 1 in 5 children live in poverty, including nearly 1 in 4 kids under the age of 5.
- Nearly 1.6 million people live in poverty, and more than 1.75 million are food insecure.

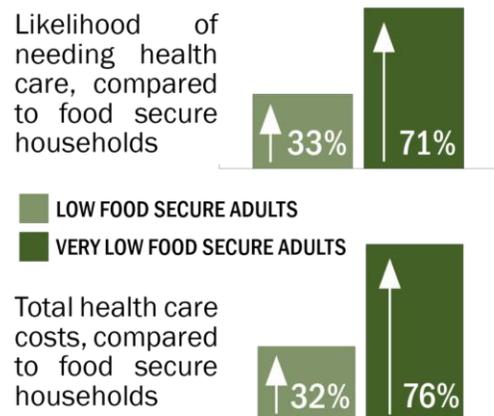
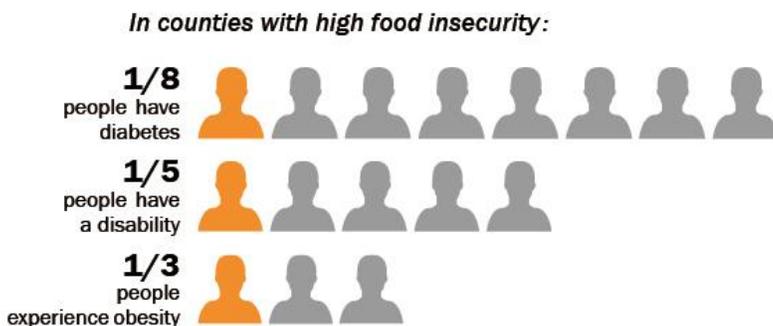
Ohio pays a high cost for allowing food insecurity to persist. For example, we know that interventions like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, make good economic sense as public health policy. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that health care usage and expenditures increase when SNAP (food stamp) benefits decrease, while a modest increase in SNAP benefits contributes to slower growth in health care usage.




SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger in our nation. SNAP provides 12 meals for every 1 meal we provide through our statewide hunger relief network. An estimated 1.4 million Ohioans turn to SNAP to help feed their families, infusing over \$170 million a month in 100 percent federally funded food assistance into our communities.

We applaud the State for exercising the option to preload and issue February SNAP benefits early during the federal government shutdown. The repercussions of even this short-term delay and disruption in SNAP benefits are significant. The impacts of larger scale cuts and changes to SNAP on demand for help from our network are long-lasting and exponential.

While hunger is a symptom of other social issues, such as poverty and lack of access to nutritious food, it also contributes to other social issues and costs. Hunger can lead to increased healthcare costs, difficulty learning in school, decreased productivity at work, and much more.



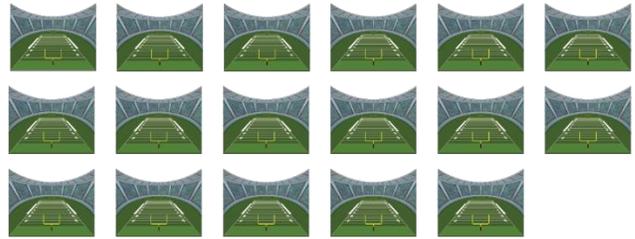
Older Adults Increasingly Rely on Help from Ohio's Foodbanks

Food insecurity in seniors worsens and exacerbates aging issues. Rates of high blood pressure, asthma, depression, chest pain, and limits to activity are higher for food insecure seniors. Chronic conditions and diseases limit employability and increase health care costs.

Demand for help with food from seniors (age 60+) is steadily increasing. Ohio seniors visited food pantries 1.74 million times last year – enough to fill Ohio Stadium 17 times.

HB 166, the 2020-2021 State Budget, is an opportunity to invest in reducing hunger and food insecurity in the Buckeye state, and to continue the strong, bipartisan support for hunger relief in Ohio that has been present for two decades.

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We strive to seek out solutions to food insecurity that are cost-effective and efficient. Our approach is to focus on **win-win** strategies that promote food security on multiple levels. No program is a greater representation of that approach than our Agricultural Clearance Program. We partner with nearly 100 Ohio farmers, growers, and commodity producers to salvage surplus, unmarketable agricultural product. Not only do we direct millions of pounds of fruits, vegetables, and protein items to Ohio families that can't afford it on their own, but we help to stabilize production issues and find an outlet for excess crops that would otherwise go to waste – lifting up Ohio's agricultural industry in the process.

This innovative program is just one of several proven strategies we use to prevent hunger from taking root in Ohio. The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is requesting your support for an amendment to provide an additional \$10 million per year in the 2020-2021 biennium to help fund a **Comprehensive Approach to Hunger Relief**, representing just \$1.25 per person, per month served by our statewide network. HB 166 contains flat funding for these critical hunger lifelines at \$19.55 million per year, at a time of rising demand, declining donations, and increasing cost.

The funds will be used for the following programs and initiatives:

- **Ohio Food Program & Agricultural Clearance Program:** Secure and distribute at least 65 million pounds of nutritious, wholesome foods at an average of just 33 cents per pound – providing 30 percent of all food distributed in Ohio.
- **Innovative Summer Meals Programs for Children:** Provide over 2 million kid-friendly, shelf-stable meals and fresh fruits and vegetables to children in rural or underserved areas of Ohio through three proven programs.
- **Wraparound Services to Increase Household Stability:** Complete over 50,000 free tax preparation and filing for low- and moderate-income taxpayers and to leverage

matching funding from the USDA for SNAP outreach to serve more than 200,000 Ohioans.

- **Build Capacity to Do More:** Support the purchase of new refrigeration and freezer equipment for food pantries and leverage matching funding for a statewide cohort of hundreds of summer and year-long AmeriCorps VISTA national service members.

To improve public health, education, and our economy, everyone must have access to nutritious food. Ohio needs to invest in an economy that works for all, including low-wage workers, and guarantee that there is access to nutritious food in low-income and rural communities.

Your support of our request will help make critical investments in programs that address food insecurity for the 1 in 6 Ohioans that turn to us for the most basic of all human needs – food. We view this *Comprehensive Approach* as a complete toolbox that would allow our State to respond to emergency food needs, increase access to federal benefits intended to improve household food security, and stabilize hungry households and the nonprofits and faith-based organizations that serve them. These are all essential tools to help families make ends meet during difficult times.

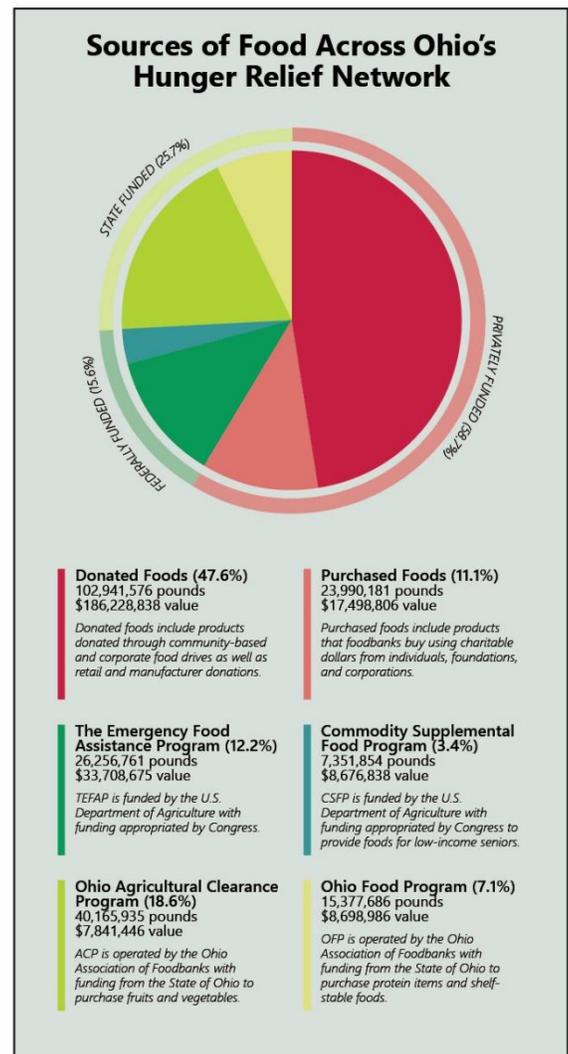
Hunger is not just a moral issue. It also leads to an estimated \$6 billion in healthcare costs. In comparison, research by Feeding America indicates that the meal gap in Ohio is about \$830 million.

In order to help us strengthen the impact of Ohio's foodbank network, we are seeking just a small fraction of that. We humbly request your support for an amendment to provide additional funding to help our statewide network meet current demand, help remove barriers to accessing benefits, and increase capacity to expand services to more of our hungry friends and neighbors. Together, we can ensure our communities have the nutritious food they need to live active, healthy lives.

Thank you and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Hamler-Fugitt
Ohio Association of Foodbanks
101 East Town Street, Suite 540
Columbus, Ohio 43215
614/221-4336 ext. 222
614/271-4803 cell



Testimony to

Ohio House of Representatives

Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

April 10, 2019

Testimony from Kimberly LoVano, Director of Advocacy and Public Education

Greater Cleveland Food Bank

Chair Mark Romanchuk, Ranking Member Thomas West, Representative Brigid Kelly,

Representative P. Scott Lipps, Representative Bill Roemer

Thank you Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee for the opportunity to address you today. I am truly honored to be here.

I am Kimberly LoVano, Director of Advocacy and Public Education for the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, where we work to ensure that everyone in our communities has the nutritious food they need every day. We serve 300,000 food insecure residents in Ashland, Richland, Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, and Ashtabula Counties. We are one of 12 Ohio food banks that provide food to hunger programs in every county throughout the state. We thank you for your longstanding support of the Ohio Food Program and the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program. To put it simply, these two programs are critical to food insecure families across our state who lack access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle.

Last year the twelve food banks across Ohio provided food to more than two million people through a network of 3,500 partner programs. Although the recession ended ten years ago, we continue to see more people coming to our doors. Within the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's six-county service area alone, we have seen an increase of 76,000 people visiting our network of programs compared to only ten years ago. This increase has consisted of working poor families, children, veterans, and older adults who have a difficult time making ends meet.

Although it was a few years ago, I still vividly remember meeting two of those older adults at a program near the Pennsylvania border in Ashtabula County. It is a rural community, with no cell reception and nothing nearby but farm land and a stop sign. The husband was filling out a survey, but had trouble keeping his hand still. Noticing this, his wife began to cry. She told me that her husband had suffered a stroke a few months earlier and never fully recovered. The stroke had changed their lives and his new medication cost nearly \$400 per month. Medical bills were stacking up from his time in the hospital and they just couldn't manage all of the expenses. Their refrigerator was empty and there was no money left to buy food. They had started coming to this program every day so they could at least keep food on the table.

This couple's gut-wrenching story is not unique. Unfortunately, this story illustrates a challenge that the majority of our clients face on a regular basis. Nearly two-thirds of the households served by our partner programs report making the decision between paying for medication or paying for groceries during the month. Food provided by the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program help make that choice a little easier and provide families with nutritious food while also paying for basic necessities, like medicine, rent, utilities, and transportation.

We continue to expand our reach within our service area and create innovative and effective programs to get this food out to our community. Our chief way of distributing this food is through our 140 mobile pantry programs, where we take a truckload of fresh Ohio produce to a church or agency parking lot. In addition to this program, we have partnered with 40 schools to provide parents and children with bags of fresh Ohio produce at the end of a school day and 35 senior centers and low-income apartment buildings to provide local produce to seniors.

One-quarter of the food distributed by the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, as well as the 11 other food banks in Ohio, comes from these two state programs. I can confidently say that we could not serve this many children, seniors, and families without them.

One extraordinary part of these programs that I have yet not mentioned is our ability to work directly with Ohio producers and growers. Through the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program, farmers can find a second life for much of the produce that would otherwise be plowed under. Imperfect produce often goes unsold, as grocery stores and food distributors hesitate to purchase fruits and vegetables that do not meet the expectations of customers. A couple of years ago we spent time with Hothouse vegetable farmers from Willard, Ohio. They told us how much the business from the food banks has meant to them. They no longer have to plow crops under, and they employ a lot of people to plant, care for and harvest the fruits and vegetables.

For twenty years the State of Ohio has supported these food programs. We thank you for your continued support and for allowing us to keep food on the table for our neighbors going through difficult times. I come here today to ask you to help us reach even more people by supporting an amendment for \$10 million per year for our Comprehensive Approach to Hunger Relief. These additional dollars will allow the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, along with food banks across the state, to have an even greater impact in alleviating hunger for the children, seniors, veterans, adults, and working families who rely on our programs to make ends meet.

Thank you.