



Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Andrew Mayle and I am the Director of the Southeast Ohio Foodbank & Regional Kitchen.

We serve Athens, Gallia, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Morgan, Perry, Vinton, and Washington counties through a network of member food pantries. We also hold drive-through food distributions at local county fairgrounds, and operate the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, a monthly food box distributed to thousands of low-income seniors in our communities.

Our Foodbank is in the heart of Appalachian Ohio. Last summer, a national news article described our region as isolated and disconnected from the rest of the American experience. This is simply untrue. Our people were in an economic crisis before the pandemic. We feared for our children whose school breakfasts and lunches are the only meals they can count on eating. We feared for our seniors who were confined to their homes and unable to pick up food boxes. We feared for our staff who went into overdrive to fill the gaps left by our decimated volunteer base.

The extended SNAP benefits afforded to Ohio's families have been a lifeline, keeping thousands of people from the brink of disaster. Our National Guard gave us the person-power to distribute millions of pounds of food during the most unprecedented economic crisis in decades. Our donor base has doubled, a testament to the generous and communal spirit of Southeast Ohio. Yet we still find ourselves desperate for solutions.

Hunger is so pervasive, so wide-spread, so horrific in Southeast Ohio that we still are not reaching everyone who needs us. Children still go hungry through the weekend. Guidance counselors have told stories of students dealing with food anxiety not for themselves, but for their parents. Teachers are so concerned for their kids that they're taking it upon themselves to personally deliver food boxes. Any child facing food insecurity is facing trauma, which we all know has adverse developmental effects on the brain. The cycle of poverty is enabled to continue because of this trauma. If we are not proactive in our approach, then we ourselves are enabling the cycle as well.

We are also concerned for our seniors, especially those who are raising grandchildren. We've seen a substantial increase in the number of seniors visiting our local pantries, and those living on a fixed income during this pandemic have been placed in dangerous situations.





We have to reach our people where they're at. This amendment will afford us the opportunity to develop the solutions that are so desperately needed, including bridging the transportation gap and providing further access to healthy foods. This amendment will also allow us the chance to hire permanent staff to help build our collective vision into the future, rather than through temporary grant-funded positions that last one year at a time.

We received a letter from an elderly woman thanking us for our Meals on Wheels program. The consistency of our services enabled her to put on weight to keep her healthy, and she was grateful to us that her ribs were no longer showing.

That's really how bad it is – not only in Southeast Ohio, but the entire state. Thankfully, there is a proposed solution.

I'm submitting written testimony to ask for your consideration and support of Amendments SC2155 and SC2155X1 to H.B. 110, which would provide a one-time-only, temporary 2-year funding increase of \$20 million per year in Section 307.40 to help provide: emergency food assistance relief through the Ohio Association of Foodbanks Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program; other essential household non-food items that can't be purchased with SNAP benefits; and a \$1 million investment per year to support capacity building for local hunger relief organizations to ensure hard-hit communities don't lose local access to charitable relief.

Hunger is 100% preventable. In a nation with so much abundance, it is unacceptable for us to allow our most vulnerable Ohioans to go without.

Thank you for your consideration of this request,

Andrew Mayle  
Food and Nutrition Division Director  
Southeast Ohio Foodbank & Regional Kitchen  
Hocking Athens Perry Community Action

