



Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig and Members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

On behalf of Lutheran Social Services and the LSS Food Pantries, I submit this testimony in opposition to the passage of Ohio Senate Bill 17. This bill would create new barriers to healthy meals, healthcare, and unemployment insurance for thousands of Ohio families. Creating barriers to services would be problematic in the best of times. The fact that this legislation is being proposed during a pandemic that has accelerated unemployment and caused disruptions in healthcare and basic needs services is very disturbing to us.

Our pantries have seen the terrible consequences of the pandemic during this past year. The percentage of households that were new to our pantry system went from 40% in 2019 to 58% in 2020.

The fact that more Ohio families are being pushed below the poverty line and need services like food pantries is precisely why this legislation is so troublesome. Rather than helping Ohioans, this legislation would hurt them by restricting access to food, Medicaid, and financial support. It would create even more barriers to receiving the help they need.

737,000 Ohioans don't have enough to eat. And one in five of Ohio's children are living in poverty--and over 130,000 children are uninsured. To put that into perspective, LSS Food Pantries served 15,205 children in 2020, making up 33% of the population served.

We urge our leaders to create opportunities for Ohio's families, not restrict them. We need to improve access to nutritious meals and quality, affordable healthcare. Let's work together to get through this pandemic, not pull the rug out from underneath those in need.

We urge Members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee to oppose Senate Bill 17 and work towards policies that support the safety and security of all Ohioans.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Fralic

Director, LSS Food Pantries