

**Ohio Government Oversight and Reform Committee**  
**Senate Bill 17**  
**To Amend Certain SNAP, Medicaid and Unemployment Insurance Requirements**  
**Matt Habash, President/CEO Mid-Ohio Food Collective**  
**February 24, 2021**

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Minority Member Craig and members of the Committee, I am Matt Habash, President and CEO of Mid-Ohio Food Collective. Today, I am sharing this written testimony to state our strong opposition to Senate Bill 17.

Mid-Ohio Food Collective is the largest food relief agency in Ohio and one of the largest in the nation, serving 20 urban, rural and Appalachian counties from Chillicothe to Marion and Marysville to Belmont, including Columbus. To give you some context of our work to connect nutritious food to those who are struggling, last year, Mid-Ohio Food Collective distributed about 75 million pounds of groceries – enough food for more than 170,000 meals each and every day, serving well over 600,000 children, seniors, veterans, disabled and others facing food insecurity. And, since the onset of the pandemic, through January 31, 2021, demand for food assistance has significantly increased, with hungry neighbors now making more than one million visits to our agency partner network. Even more alarming is the 56,000 plus families who are asking for food - for our help -- for the very first time – displaced workers, isolated seniors, and children without access to school meals. These are folks who are like you and me, just trying to take care of their families in these highly confusing and unsettling times.

This proposal raises great concerns around the eligibility criteria between SNAP and other assistance programs, ultimately increasing workloads and costs. Likewise, the reporting requirement changes will have the same impact, but likely will increase error rates.

The changes to SNAP and Medicaid eligibility in Senate Bill 17 *will* – without question -- increase food insecurity and force more Ohioans to turn to organizations such as ours for the most basic of needs – food. In particular, we are especially concerned about our low income seniors, who more often than not, are extraordinarily hesitant to share personal information and will instead forego needed assistance, adversely impacting their health and increasing healthcare costs, rather than comply with requirements created under this proposal. Quite simply, this proposal is bad public policy and makes no economic sense.

The elimination of broad-based eligibility and waivers, allowing response to local economic and social circumstances – especially at a time of some of the greatest need our state has ever seen - will deny individuals and families healthy sustenance and medical care. It will strain resources for charitable organizations as well as increase demands on medical service providers, negatively impacting the overall health and well-being of our vulnerable neighbors, communities and state.

The increased demand is impacting all levels of government, especially city and county agencies overseeing assistance programs. At a time these entities are already struggling to serve more people while staying COVID-19 compliant in their own practices - placing additional regulatory burdens on them will lessen their ability to serve our communities.

Pilot programs have been running to allow online SNAP purchases; how will a photo ID requirement work online? This proposal has a tremendous, inequitable impact on senior and disabled recipients, placing added burdens very specifically on low-income families. From a practical standpoint, if an individual has a family member or relies on other approved proxies shopping for them, what will be the expectation of frontline workers in checking and enforcing SNAP card identification?

Last month alone, more than 600 people requested assistance through digital referrals to our SNAP Outreach team. While families continue to struggle and demand for food assistance continue to increase, we are working hard to make sure that we meet the need of any family, individual, veteran or senior who does not have enough to eat – whether that assistance comes by way of a food pantry, help in applying for SNAP, or wraparound services at one of our Mid-Oho Markets.

For so many families and through no fault of their own, the reality of hunger and poverty is indeed real – a crisis they are facing day in and day out. Rather than create barriers, we should be figuring out how to mitigate them – Ohioans helping Ohioans.

Eliminating existing waivers and implementing other provisions of SB17 *will* limit access to needed food and health services and *will* exacerbate the conditions placing and keeping our neighbors in need. Stigmatizing these same people with unwieldy photo requirements only deepens the inequity.

The focus of this Bill is on those few that abuse the system – not the majority of those who are working every day to ensure that they have food on their tables for their families. The SNAP program has less than a 1 – 2 percent fraud rate, encompassing that which is also committed at the retailer end. For another perspective, we have numerous success stories of those who are lifting themselves up from poverty with assistance of the SNAP program – a proven, effective safety net for our neighbors who simply don't have enough food. Which raises a particularly troubling question: How many of these individuals would have lost that needed assistance if this Bill was in effect? No one *wants* to visit a food pantry; they come because they must – because they are just trying to do right by their families. We should start and end with no judgement – but “by the grace of God, go I.”

Let's not short-circuit these Ohio family success stories with costly, unwieldy new regulations that serve only to create more roadblocks for those who are already struggling. Instead, let's focus on how best to ensure assistance gets to those who need it, through innovative efforts such as the Pandemic EBT cards, online purchasing programs and other recent service advances.

Madame Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your time and consideration. We at Mid-Ohio Food Collective are happy to answer questions or follow up with additional information. I will also ask each of you to visit your local food bank to see firsthand their operations and to learn more about what we are doing toward ending hunger.

On behalf of Mid-Ohio Food Collective, we urge opposition to Senate Bill 17.

Thank you,

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