



## **Written Testimony – West Ohio Food Bank – Senate Bill 17**

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

The West Ohio Food Bank serves food insecure Ohioans in Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Mercer, Paulding, Putnam, Seneca, Shelby, Van Wert, and Wyandot Counties. In 2018, about 11.6 percent of the residents in our 11-county service territory experienced food insecurity, just shy of 60,000 people. Food insecurity can sometimes be stigmatized or experienced in isolation here, but we're proud of our work to make having enough food about basic dignity for our neighbors.

Prior to the pandemic, we opened our first on-site food pantry at our foodbank. We've been so relieved for the extra coolers and storage space, where we can now stage pre-packed emergency food boxes and produce to distribute through a drive-through model to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. We've also been incredibly grateful for the hardworking hands of the Ohio National Guard soldiers that have helped us keep food moving into the warehouse and out the door to our neighbors. And it's been so painfully necessary. Projections by Feeding America indicate that more than 20,000 additional people in our service territory were newly food insecure in 2020, bringing our local food insecurity rate to 15.6 percent and flooding our foodbank with new need for help.

We don't notice any trends showing the need will let up soon. In fact, not only do we estimate that about 30 percent of the people we've served the past year had never turned to our network for help before, but we also estimate that about two-thirds of the people we were serving *before* the pandemic are now turning to us for help more frequently. That's in spite of federal nutrition relief that has been critical but remains temporary, like a modest boost to SNAP benefits and the Pandemic EBT program for children in households with low incomes. We have seen an increase of 69% more food distributed in 2020 than we did in the previous year pre-pandemic.

I'm sharing all of this to hit home this one critical point: Now is *especially* not the time to do anything that would weaken the fragile safety nets we have in place for the 80,560 food insecure people in our 11-county area. Senate Bill 17 is misguided legislation focused on creating solutions for problems that simply don't exist from our perspective at the West Ohio Food Bank. I witness with my own eyes every day the suffering that people are experiencing and the hope and security that a few days' worth of nutritious food can give them. The West Ohio Food Bank believes it is wrong to place any new barriers or restrictions in place that would limit access to SNAP – whether that's change reporting for hardworking people with incomes that fluctuate week to week, or asset restrictions that would force people to sell their cars or spend down their meager retirement savings before getting help with food, or photo ID laws that would further stigmatize shopping for groceries with SNAP. Instead of moving forward on Senate Bill 17, the West Ohio Food Bank would urge the Ohio General Assembly to focus on investments and policies that support their struggling constituents as they work to survive the current crisis and thrive in its aftermath. We look forward to being your partners in those efforts.

Sincerely,  
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