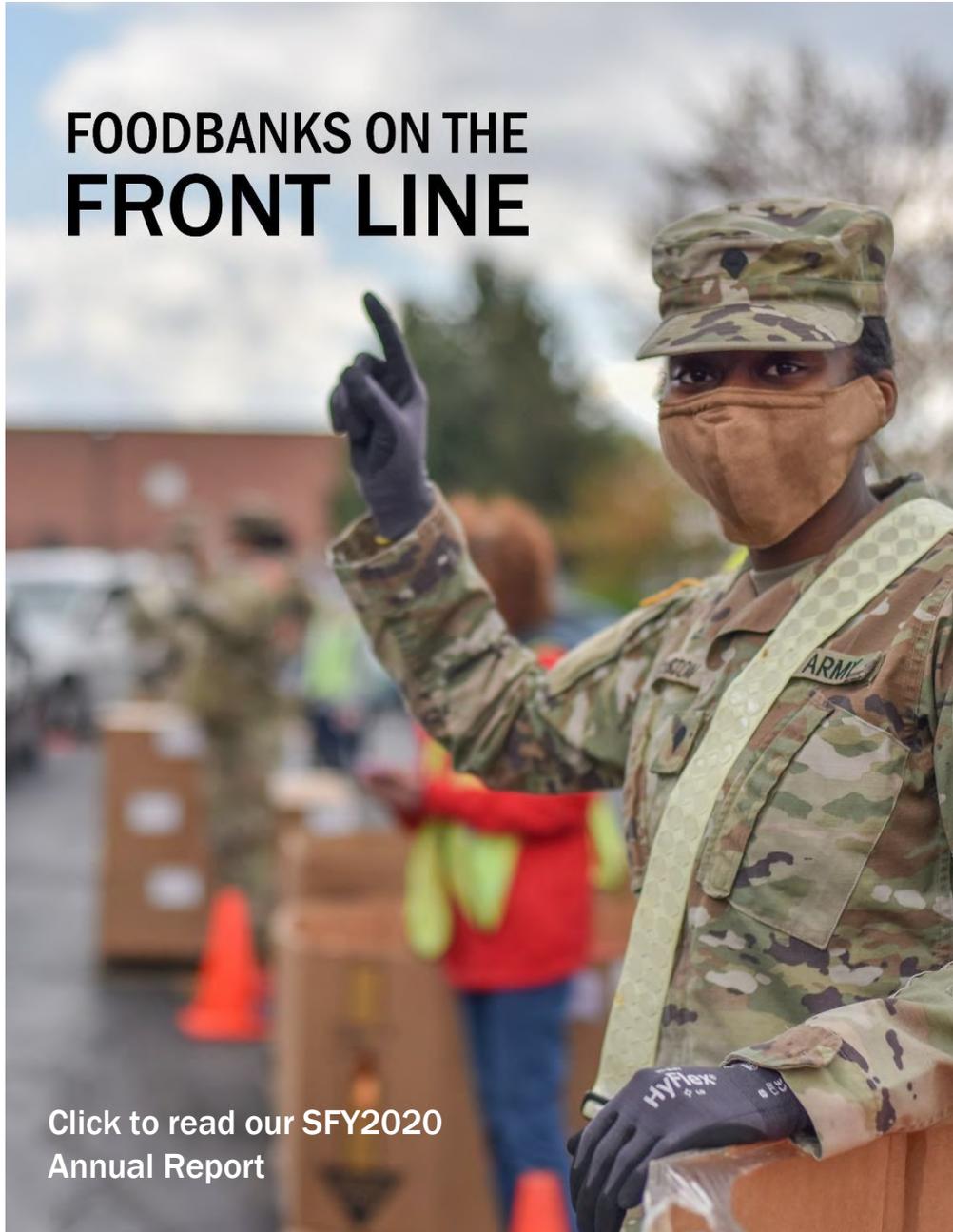


# FOODBANKS ON THE FRONT LINE



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Testimony to Ohio Senate Health Committee

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Ohio Association of Foodbanks

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Amended Sub. H.B. 110

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your previous support.

I'm Lisa Hamler-Fugitt and I serve as the executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger. We proudly represent 12 Ohio Feeding America foodbanks, and nearly 3,600-member food pantries, soup kitchens, and other hunger relief agencies, who distributed over 270 million pounds of food to more than 2.5 million Ohioans last year. Our mission is to provide food and other resources to people in need and to pursue areas of common interest for the benefit of people in need. I am joined today by three of our foodbank directors and you will hear from each of them about the need and challenges their foodbanks are facing in the wake of the pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our association's budget request and for your current and previous support of our longtime public-private partnership, the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance Programs (OFPACP), which are funded through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

These programs began in the early days of welfare reform and have received bipartisan support from 5 governors and 12 Ohio General Assemblies since creation in the 1998/99 state budget. These programs provide more than 20 percent (54.245 million) of all of the food distributed statewide by our network. Last year, we secured 32,159,776 pounds of fruits, vegetables and protein items purchased for just pennies on the pound from Ohio farmers, growers, and commodity producers who have surplus or unmarketable perishable foods (cosmetically challenged fruits and vegetables). These represent the most healthy and wholesome foods we have to distribute. We purchased 22,085,573 pounds of shelf-stable foods, purchased directly from food manufacturers and wholesalers by semi-tractor trailer loads. These foods provide a steady and reliable source of center-of-the-plate staples that are missing from our other sources of food, including federal commodity programs and retail, manufacturer, food drive, and local donation programs.

Foodbanks are required per Ohio Revised Code to serve Ohioans with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, the level of income most economists consider as the minimum level of income needed to achieve a self-sufficiency standard of living.

Foodbank eligibility is limited to people/households with gross incomes at or below 200 percent of the [Federal Poverty Level](#) (FPL). 200 percent of FPL for one person is \$25,760; for 2 people is \$34,840; for 3 people is \$43,920.

Region	People ≤ 200% FPL	% ≤ 200% FPL	People ≤ 100% FPL	% ≤ 100% FPL
Senate District 5	131,188	39.3%	61,649	18.5%
Senate District 6	92,801	27.0%	38,745	11.3%
Senate District 9	153,249	45.3%	82,980	24.5%
Senate District 14	114,013	31.8%	49,761	13.9%
Senate District 22	91,082	25.8%	34,501	9.8%
Senate District 23	128,083	38.6%	57,229	17.2%
Senate District 27	68,813	20.2%	24,608	7.2%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>3,538,045</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>1,588,343</b>	<b>14.0%</b>

Source: The Center for Community Solutions, 2021 Legislative Fact Sheets, sourced 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, compiled by The Center for Community Solutions. [www.CommunitySolutions.com](http://www.CommunitySolutions.com)

These programs provided Ohio foodbanks a critical lifeline as demand skyrocketed and we became ground zero for the tremendous need caused by the COVID pandemic and the economic fallout it caused, especially on low-income Ohioans, who lost their jobs as restaurants, hotels, schools, child and senior care centers, retail businesses, and more closed. The association and our members are deeply grateful to Governor DeWine, the Ohio National Guard, FEMA, USDA, local, state and federal governments who have helped us respond to the dramatic increase for food assistance during these extraordinary times.

The shock wave of COVID directly impacted the elderly Ohioans who often volunteer reliably at foodbank warehouses, and who often single-handedly operate local faith-based food pantries, as they sheltered at home to protect themselves from exposure. Corporate volunteer groups understandably cancelled shifts as their employers told them to work from home and prohibited their volunteer activities. On March 22, 2020, Governor DeWine issued a disaster declaration, declared Ohio foodbanks as essential workers, and deployed the Ohio National Guard to help us operate our foodbanks and food pantries, help box and package food and groceries, and establish mass food distribution sites across the state in order to help us respond to the overwhelming demand. These citizens soldiers are continuing to serve with us on this hunger relief mission and without their dedication and support we would be unable to keep up with the overwhelming demand and respond to this public health crisis that has changed our daily lives.

The pandemic has significantly worsened food insecurity for newly displaced workers. About a third of the people served by Ohio's foodbank network statewide reported they had **NEVER** turned to a foodbank before for help. **Food insecurity rates skyrocketed.** Feeding America estimates that about 1 in 6 Ohioans – including nearly 1 in 4 Ohio children – were food insecure in 2020. Food hardships are especially high among Black and Latino households. This disparity reflects both long-standing inequities across society and the disproportionate impact of the current crisis on those households unemployed workers, low-wage workers struggling with job losses, reduced hours at work and lighter paychecks, parents who have had to leave the workforce to care for their children or to protect their health or the health of loved ones, and low-income seniors left even more isolated by the crisis.

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) 100% Federally Funded**

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is the first line of defense against hunger, providing 9 meals for every 1 meal provided by foodbanks. Federal COVID relief has provide a temporary 15 percent maximum benefit increase as well as Emergency Allotments to bring households up to the maximum benefit. **Unfortunately, half of the people we serve at our foodbanks are not eligible for SNAP, because they earn slightly too much to qualify for this federal food assistance program.** In Ohio, SNAP eligibility is limited to households with gross incomes at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level and net incomes at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

The loss of the state's Public Health declaration SB 22 will result in the loss of about \$120 million in SNAP Emergency Allotment relief benefits **each month** after the public health emergency expires unless there is additional state action to extend a declaration.

[February 2021 Monthly SNAP Caseload](#)

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

654,351 children and 880,017 adults  
1,534,368 Total Ohioans on SNAP, living in 765,426 households  
\$214.00 Average per person/per month benefit  
\$328,982,015 Total February Monthly Benefit Issuance (100% federally funded)

Hundreds of thousands of our fellow Ohioans, who were already struggling to make ends meet, living one low wage paycheck to the next, have been decimated. Most had no savings, and not much in their cupboards they needed to feed themselves – and their families continue to turn to our food lifelines. Any actions that would further erode access to or limit enrollment in SNAP will only increase hunger and food insecurity in Ohio.

### Additional Threats Loom Large for Hungry Ohioans and Foodbanks

- Beginning this year, Ohio foodbanks have begun to experience a sharp decline in the availability of federal commodities that we had to distribute – meaning there will be significantly less food and as we face a sizable commodities cliff.
- In just the last quarter Ohio experienced a 10 million pound reduction in federal food from the Farmers to Families Food box program from the previous quarter, representing a loss of 14.6%. This program ends permanently at the end of May.
- With the retail and manufactured food donations down by 7.6% from 43.6% in 2019 to 36.3% in 2020 while the need increased exponentially, Ohio foodbanks have relied heavily on sourcing food from other channels including purchasing food with limited private support and funding.
- Ohio's foodbanks have purchased more food each month during the pandemic with private sector charitable dollars to keep up with the demand – but this is not sustainable.
- Food cost are up by 10% and food shortages are growing by the day, as commodity availability is limited due to weather related crop losses, and reduced processing capacities are hard-pressed to produce more for household consumption.
- Ohio's foodbanks are also absorbing sharp increases in operational costs, fuel/transport to increasing food storage, sanitation expenses to additional staffing. We project that the increased costs are likely to continue for at least the next 2 years.
- CBO estimates it will be 2024 before the low wage job market recovers and we will need to ensure there are opportunities to promote an equitable recovery for all, while we work to keep food on the plates of these Ohioans as they struggle to recover.
- Any proposed policy changes that would threaten or limit participation, enrollment and/or access to SNAP/Food Stamp benefits in Ohio will directly impact the demand on our system and should be rejected outright.

<p>Over 800,000 low-income school aged children in Ohio will be working to make up for the learning loss and behavioral and mental health impacts of the pandemic. They need to have adequate, nutritious food to support their growing brains and bodies.</p>	<p>More than 1 in 4 Ohio kids (27.1 percent) lived in food insecure households in 2020. Most recently, the U.S. Census Bureau's Pulse Survey found that nearly 3 in 10 Ohio households with children (28.9 percent) experienced food insecurity in December 2020.</p>	<p>Ohio's seniors continue to turn to us for help with food on limited, fixed incomes. Now, more than 1 in 5 of the people served by Ohio's foodbanks are over age 60. Our network served seniors nearly 400,000 more times in state fiscal year 2020 than the previous year.</p>
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**Currently** HB 110 provides flat funding of \$24.5 million each year in support of the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance Programs and a one-time investment of \$12 million in CARES Act funding in calendar year 2021 only.

**Request**

Amendment SC 2155 to Sub. HB 110 to **provide a one-time-only, temporary 2-year funding increase of \$20 million per year in Section 307.40** (funded with pass-through TANF and/or GRF dollars or a combination of both) to help provide: emergency food assistance relief through the association's 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.

We recognize this may seem like a significant increase in funding for anti-hunger efforts. However, this is reflective of the unprecedented era of food insecurity and financial instability, widespread in our communities and across our state. This is a critical temporary investment to help ensure that every Ohioan can be part of an equitable recovery that meets basic needs and invests in the health and well-being of each person.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for your time and consideration. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. I will also ask each of you to visit your local foodbank to see firsthand their operations and to learn more about what we are doing together to prevent hunger in the buckeye state.

On behalf of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, we humbly request your support for this additional funding for temporary emergency hunger relief. More specifically, we ask for your support on behalf of the 1 in 5 Ohioans we serve who deserve the dignity of three balanced meals each day. Together, we can invest in a recovery that includes every person and meets every person's basic needs. We can help hungry Ohioans heal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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