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The Foodbank, Inc.
Ohio Senate Finance Committee Amended Sub. HB 110

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Interested Party Testimony, H.B. 110

Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavorne, Ranking Minority Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks budget request regarding amended substitute HB 110: the State Operating Budget.

My name is Michelle L. Riley, and I am the CEO of The Foodbank, Inc. in Dayton. The Foodbank works with a network of 116 food pantries, hot meal sites, and other hunger relief organizations to fulfill our vision that “no one should go hungry.” Through these efforts, we distributed 17.8 million pounds of food in Montgomery, Greene, and Preble counties last fiscal year.

At the height of the pandemic, the percent of households seeking food assistance from our network for the first time surpassed 70% at some distributions. Simultaneously, about 40% of our partner agencies were forced to close, and many of them still have not reopened. The pandemic has placed immense pressure on our network: We have spent more money than ever before on wholesale food purchases, hired temporary staff to offset losses in volunteer labor, and organized mass food distributions of record-breaking size. In our three-county service area alone, over 125,000 individuals sought food assistance at our food pantries in calendar year 2020.

We have heard from numerous clients who have seen positive changes in their lives after accessing charitable food assistance. We recently spoke to a Foodbank client named Roslyn, a retiree who was picking up food at our Drive Thru for herself and her two sons. One of her sons is a full-time student; the other has had his income cut in half recently. She said that the food she receives at The Foodbank helps her to stretch her income and pay her bills. Roslyn, who is diabetic, said she especially appreciated the fresh produce because it has helped her lose weight and live a healthy lifestyle. Roslyn is one of many clients who rely on Foodbank programs to obtain fresh, healthy food they cannot afford at the grocery store.

We would like to thank you for your longstanding support of the Ohio Food Program and Agriculture Clearance program. These programs provide vital assistance to families in our area who have found themselves unable to afford to put food on the table amidst the pandemic. At The Foodbank alone, we distributed nearly 4 million pounds of food from these state-funded programs last year. The programs supply some of the most

wholesome, healthy foods in our network and made up more than 21 percent of all the food we distributed.

While we are hopeful for the future, it is likely that financial recovery from the pandemic will be slow. After the Great Recession, rates of food insecurity in Ohio did not return to pre-recession levels for 10 years. Given the ongoing uncertainty so many Ohio families are facing, we encourage the state to make the investments necessary to support low-income individuals in our area.

Alongside other hunger relief advocates across the state, we are requesting support for an amendment to provide temporary 2-year support of \$20 million per year to support the purchase of additional perishable and shelf stable foods through the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program, as well as personal care, personal hygiene and household cleaning items that can't be purchased with SNAP benefits. These temporary funds will be used to purchase and replenish critical food supplies; support the transportation, storage, and distribution of this food and other essential household items; and to support capacity building for local hunger relief organizations to ensure hard-hit communities can access charitable food assistance.

The past year has put unprecedented strain and uncertainty on Ohio households and our charitable food assistance network. We are grateful for the support the Ohio Legislature has demonstrated to food banks during the pandemic. This amendment will help sustain our efforts as households in our area continue to recover. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.