



mid-ohio food collective

**Ohio Senate Finance Committee
House Bill 33
Ohio Food Bank Funding
Matt Habash, President/CEO Mid-Ohio Food Collective
May 25, 2023**

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am Matt Habash, President and CEO of Mid-Ohio Food Collective (MOFC). I am sharing this written testimony as an interested party to House Bill 33, the state operating budget, to highlight the needed support of funding for Ohio's food banks and related services to address hunger and poverty.

Mid-Ohio Food Collective is the largest hunger relief agency in central and eastern Ohio and one of the largest in the nation. We serve 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 76 million pounds of food—enough for more than 170,000 meals every day. We served more than 620,000 children, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, and others facing food insecurity in calendar year 2022.

Our numbers thus far in 2023 are startling. When we compare the prior week of this year to the same period last year, we see 43 percent more total visits and an increase in customers of 30 percent. We have also had a 43 percent increase in new customers - families and individuals seeking food assistance from MOFC or one of our partner agencies for the very first time. All this is despite Ohio's continued, near-record-low unemployment rate as hard working families are struggling to put food on the table as inflationary costs for groceries, utilities and other daily essentials strain already stretched budgets.

With these increased service numbers, MOFC is also experiencing the impact of inflation. Even as we continue buying more food and personal care items, we are experiencing double-digit increases in the price of meat, eggs, and other staples. Two additional factors impacting our customers and services are:

- 1) The end of the SNAP Emergency Allotments, eliminating over \$25 million a month in support in our 20-county service region. While an average per-person loss of over \$80 a month in supplemental food purchasing power will hit all recipients hard, it may be most devastating to low-income seniors, many of whom will revert to the current \$23 minimum monthly allotment.
- 2) The end of the Public Health Emergency declared in response to the COVID pandemic will increase daily living costs for low-income earners and their dependents. With the loss of Medicaid coverage, rental and utility assistance and other supports enacted due to the pandemic, dollars for nutritious food will be stretched more thinly than ever.

Before laying out our request, I want to express a heartfelt thank you. The appropriations last year of \$15 million for Ohio fresh food and \$25 million for additional purchases are helping us continue to meet the increased need this year. These funds, in addition to what was previously appropriated, are instrumental in restocking our shelves to help feed our neighbors. We also appreciate the additional \$15 million appropriated by the Ohio House of Representatives over the flat funding in the as-introduced budget.

Unfortunately, we do not foresee a decrease in need this year or next. Until inflation abates and prices, rent, and other essential cost centers come down - not simply level off, but drop - we expect our elevated numbers to continue. With these increased customer numbers comes growing need for support to ensure we and all of Ohio's hunger relief network can respond.

With that, we support the Ohio Association of Food Banks (OAFB) ask on behalf of its 12 members:

- 1) For support of amendment SC0437 for the purchases of an additional \$10.45 million per year, over the budget proposal as passed by the Ohio House of Representatives, to support the purchases of another 100 million pounds of food through the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance programs to help feed our hungry friends and neighbors. This would provide \$50 million yearly for food that is then distributed throughout the state's food bank network.
- 1) For support of amendment SC 0227 that would provide a modest temporary minimum monthly benefit of just \$50 for up to 70,000 low-income seniors on SNAP whose benefits dropped from \$281 per month to \$23 per month. This amendment appropriates \$21,415,000 in each fiscal year in GRF ALI 600564, SNAP State Supplement. For a person receiving the minimum \$23 benefit, the state would provide this person with \$27 per month, ensuring they have \$50 a month (or \$1.66 per day) to eat. If this supplemental state food assistance benefit keeps 329 seniors aging in place and at home instead of going into a nursing home at a cost of \$65,000 per person, per year, the program becomes cost neutral.
- 2) For support of Amendment SC0438 to provide up to \$2.5 million per year to support Health Care Navigators to support in-person health insurance program enrollment assistance services for Ohioans who may become ineligible for the Medicaid Program. These funds will be regranted to organizations that provide in-person navigation services to assist eligible Ohioans who will need to enroll through the ACA Marketplace Health Insurance program. These navigators are licensed by the Ohio Department of Insurance and the State of Ohio currently does not provide any assistance or support in providing these services across the state.

There is unprecedented need for food assistance across the state, including in the communities that we serve across Ohio. In response, we continue to expand our fundraising efforts, find new food sources, and implement multiple changes to meet the increased demand. Many of the neighbors we serve were struggling before the onset of the pandemic; their hardships are now greater than ever—hardships that we know will take months and even years from which to recover. We are requesting a critical investment to help Ohioans get through these turbulent times to better days ahead.

Mr. 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 share 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 you to support the requests for House Bill 33 from Ohio's food bank network. More specifically, we ask for your support on behalf of our neighbor - seniors, children, people with disabilities, veterans - those who have seen their work and personal circumstances change so dramatically in recent times. Together, we can bridge the gap and help families connect to the most basic of needs: food.

Thank you,

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