

WRITTEN TESTIMONY



Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Tommie Harner, Chief Executive Officer
Director May 25, 2023
Amended House Bill 33

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino and Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the state of hunger in Ohio.

My name is Tommie Harner and I represent the West Ohio Food Bank located in Lima, Ohio. West Ohio Food Bank covers an 11-county area located in West Central Ohio. Those counties include: Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Mercer, Paulding, Putnam, Seneca, Shelby, Van Wert, and Wyandot.

During the pandemic, our food bank saw record numbers of individuals coming through our food lines needing assistance. When the pandemic was nearing an end, we were confident that the number of individuals in our food lines would decrease and we could return to some resemblance of normality. However, we couldn't have projected that these trends would continue. And as a matter of fact, be worse in some situations.

Being one of the smallest food banks in Ohio, we do not have the resources available to us that a larger food bank has such as a high volume of corporate donors, manufacturers, etc. While we have some very loyal and consistent donors, we can't rely on them as the only source we have to receive food for those we serve. Currently, our inventory level is less than 700,000 pounds and while that sounds like a lot, we distributed more than that last month. What we have now would last us approximately 29 days if we didn't receive any more food into our warehouse. This is very concerning to us as the number of people we are seeing daily needing food continues to increase.

We have seen a 21% increase in the number of individuals needing food assistance from February through April. The need continues to rise and the number of new families who have never had to turn to a food bank are finding themselves in food lines. During the month of April, 3,553 individuals were new to utilizing our network. What's alarming is 26% were seniors age 60 and older with 161 of them being over the age of 85. For many of these seniors, pride has prevented them from asking for help in the past but now they have no choice. They must turn to food banks to put food on their tables just to survive.

“We are a couple in our 70’s. Had it not been for the food distributions, we would most likely have had very little to eat due to the high costs of the medication I have to take for my COPD and heart issues. We thank you so much for being there for us and so many people.” – Larry and Pamela H.

“I am 70 and I live with my disabled brother (he has anoxic brain damage and has been disabled since 1986.) When they say inflation has been at 8%, that is just a small part of the picture. If it just meant we were spending 8% more that would be bad enough but everything has gone up and many things well over 8%. West Ohio Food Bank has made it possible for us to have fresh fruits and vegetables. It has made it possible for us to often have real meat instead of processed lunch meats and hot dogs. West Ohio Food Bank has helped us stretch our budget for soap products, pet foods, masks, gloves, cleaning products and more. It helps us keep nutritious foods in our freezer and pantry and for our pets, it reduces our worry and anxiety. Thank you, West Ohio food Bank.” – Dawn T.

We must rely on the Agricultural Clearance Program and Ohio Food Program through the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to supplement what small amounts of food we receive through USDA and donated. We do not have a budget that permits us to continue purchasing food to meet the needs of our hungry neighbors. These programs ensure that fresh and nutritious foods are going to our children, adults and seniors. No one should have to worry about where their next meal will come from.

Today, we are humbly requesting your consideration of the following amendments to HB 33.

Support of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks amendment SC0437 that will provide an additional \$10.45 million per year to support the purchase of 100 million pounds of food through the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance programs from Ohio farmers, growers and commodity producers and to provide this food to food insecure and hungry Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

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