Chairman Dolan, ranking member Sykes, and members of the finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nick Bates and I am Deacon in Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and director of the Hunger Network in Ohio – an ecumenical network that believes we can end hunger in Ohio by addressing the root causes of poverty.

People of faith are on the front lines fighting hunger and poverty in Ohio, but we cannot do it alone. The vast majority of our charitable work comes after our neighbors are in crisis. Our state government has the opportunity to reduce hunger in our communities before it starts.

I encourage you to take a step back from amendment language, fiscal notes, and legalese and ask yourself what type of world do we want to leave for our children and grandchildren?

I believe Ohio will be stronger when we guarantee all receive their daily bread, children - regardless of zip code - receive equitable and adequate education, where our parks and libraries are top in the country. To do this we must invest in efforts that are effective, accountable, and efficient at achieving the desired outcomes.

**Here are our top three recommendations.**

*First, we need you to invest in Ohio's food banks.* Ohio's 12 regional food banks are the backbone of our charitable response to hunger in Ohio. The pandemic phase of COVID-19 might be over, but the scars of the pandemic remain. Higher need and fewer volunteers are the new reality, and our faith-based pantries are struggling to keep food on the shelves. Our food bank network is effective, accountable, and efficient at getting healthy food from farms to families. Please **support a $50 million** a year appropriation for our food banks.

*Second, we should strengthen SNAP.* We encourage you to increase the minimum SNAP benefit for persons over 60 by $27 a month to $50. Growing old should never mean growing hungry. This small increase will provide countless households a bit more food security. According to research from the Center for Community Solutions, "SNAP has a long record of impeccable program integrity."[1] SNAP is effective, efficient, and accountable. Let's build on what works and guarantee seniors receive their daily bread.

*Finally, we can reduce childhood hunger by expanding school meals*. In Ohio, children cannot learn on empty stomachs. As I travel the state, I ask congregations and groups of people what is one thing we learned from the pandemic? In every conversation somebody tells me, school meals work. Public schools provide students the necessities to learn – text books, computers, transportation, *and food* is a necessity. Expanding School meals will reduce bureaucracy, reduce stigma, and most importantly reduce hunger. We appreciate the steps made in the House and

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[1] https://www.communitysolutions.com/research/ohio-snap-program-maintains-strong-anti-fraud-protections/

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encourage the Senate to adopt an amendment to expand the school breakfast program – minimal cost with large impact.

**In closing, budgets are moral documents.** This document is Ohio's Roadmap that will guide us to where do we want to be over the next two years. I encourage you to step back from all the amendments and legislative language and again ask yourself what type of world do you want to leave for the next generation?

As a person of faith, I believe we can solve our most pressing issues – equitable and adequate school funding, clean water, childcare, growing mental health needs, a lack affordable housing as well hunger in our communities. These issues, and many more, cannot be segregated and looked on in isolation. Instead, the issue should be how to make Ohio the best place to raise a family. The faith community continues to do our part to show love and compassion to our neighbors but we need our public leaders – *our public servants* – to lead in serving our communities.

Be good stewards of our shared resources.

Prioritize those who are often called the least of these in your final budget decisions.

**Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.**

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