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July 12, 2023

Ohio Association of Foodbanks Executive Director Lisa Hamler-Fugitt to Retire After More than 20 Years of Leadership

Joree Novotny, Long-Tenured Chief of Staff, Appointed as New Executive Director

Columbus, OH – [The Ohio Association of Foodbanks](#) Board of Directors today announced the upcoming retirement of the organization’s longtime executive director, Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, who will retire at the end of this year after leading the association for more than 20 years. The Board announced the appointment of Joree Novotny as the association’s new executive director. Novotny will be taking over the leadership reins from Hamler-Fugitt after a period of transition, a promotion that follows her successful tenure as director of external affairs and most recently as chief of staff for the organization.

“Lisa is a leader among leaders who has been widely recognized for her contributions at the state and national levels,” said Julie Chase-Morefield, president and CEO of the Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio and board chair for the association. “Our statewide hunger relief network, and indeed our peers throughout the country, owe her a debt of gratitude. She has worked hand-in-hand with Joree and the organization’s dedicated staff to build a reputation for driving innovation on behalf of the Ohioans we serve, and as we celebrate Lisa’s outstanding legacy, our board is excited to see Joree take the organization to the next level.”

In addition to securing hundreds of millions of dollars in public and private grants, providing training and technical assistance as an expert organizer, and serving as a passionate, people-first advocate, Hamler-Fugitt has: served on the executive committee of Advocates for Ohio’s Future; as co-chair of Ohio Smart Agriculture: Solutions from the Land; as a consumer representative on the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board; as a member of Feeding America’s Policy Engagement and Advocacy Committee; and on the board of OSU Extension. She was inducted into the Ohio Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2022, received the 2022 Jane B. Sheats Community Impact Award, was named the 2015 Dick Goebel Public Service Award recipient by Feeding America, and received the Child Advocate of the Year by the Public Children’s Services Association of Ohio in 2009.

“It has been the honor of my life to serve in this capacity as an advocate, organizer, trainer, and fundraiser working for the people of Ohio and the providers they count on,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “I’ve been privileged to collaborate with our board, staff, and partners to create, implement, and expand high-impact programs and to be a spokesperson for people impacted by hunger. I couldn’t be more thrilled that the Ohio Association of Foodbanks Board has chosen Joree to lead an organization whose mission and staff I care so much about. Joree’s talent, passion, and commitment to our members and the millions of food insecure Ohioans we serve will advance Ohio as a place where all people have the chance to thrive.”

Novotny joined the organization in 2010 and has become a key leader in leveraging resources, helping to secure funding for initiatives ranging from health care coverage outreach and enrollment in partnership with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to AmeriCorps resources to support capacity building for Ohio’s health and human services sector to local food purchasing programs in partnership with the USDA and the State of Ohio. She has led a variety of statewide

efforts to coordinate emergency responses, communication plans, and advocacy campaigns, from liaising with the Ohio National Guard during their deployment to foodbanks at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to navigating Farm Bill and state budget debates.

“Joree’s extensive experience and strategic leadership have been instrumental in driving the association’s efforts to ensure access to nutritious food for all Ohioans,” said Chase-Morefield. “Her exceptional track record in collaborating with community partners, advocating for policy change, and implementing innovative solutions made it clear to us that she is the right person for this moment.”

Prior to her career at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Joree spent a year in national service as an AmeriCorps VISTA member at the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, where she learned more about the interconnectedness between food security, poverty, wage and wealth disparity, public policy and social justice.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to continue serving the people of Ohio as the association’s executive director,” said Novotny. “Under Lisa’s incomparable leadership, the association has achieved significant milestones in the face of extraordinary circumstances. I am committed to building upon that legacy, working alongside our remarkable staff, partner agencies, and stakeholders to promote improved food and economic security."

As the association’s executive director, Novotny is committed to seeking out opportunities to build dignity and resiliency for people and within systems. Her vision includes putting social justice and equity at the heart of everything the association does; positioning its network to be leaders in response to a rapidly changing local, national, and global food supply chain; adapting to meet the shifting needs of an aging population; and working to ensure that the wellbeing of Ohio’s people is prioritized alongside its evolving economy and infrastructure.

"The Ohio Association of Foodbanks board of directors has complete confidence in Joree’s ability to lead this organization into the future,” said Chase-Morefield. “Under Joree’s guidance, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks will continue to make significant strides in addressing hunger and building a stronger, more resilient Ohio, just as it has for the past two decades under Lisa’s unwavering leadership.”

Through her tenure, Hamler-Fugitt has collaborated with five Ohio governors and 14 General Assemblies to implement a host of highly effective public-private partnerships. She has also been instrumental in developing direct relationships with Ohio’s agricultural community. Among her many accomplishments was the development of the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program, a nationwide model for directing surplus agricultural products to food insecure community members. Hamler-Fugitt will move into a director emeritus role with the association before officially retiring at the end of the year.

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About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio’s largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,600 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters who serve all 88 counties in Ohio. Follow the association on [Twitter](#), stay connected on [Facebook](#) and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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