



Letter sent to leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus and Ohio members of the CBC

August 11, 2023

Dear CBC members,

As a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, you uniquely understand the challenges faced by Black Americans in a country that remains plagued by systemic inequity, disparity, and racism. This is discernible across the spectrum in nearly every facet and institution of American life but arguably no more apparent than in our health and human service delivery and outcomes. On nearly every health and poverty measure, Black Americans fare worse than their white counterparts no matter where you are in this country. Black Ohioans, who make up a mere 14.3 percentⁱ of Ohio's population for example, suffer a poverty rate of 27.7 percent compared to that of white Ohioans with a poverty rate of 10.3 percentⁱⁱ. With the country's ninth largest race wage gap, white Ohioans have a median income that is 84 percent higher than that of Black Ohioansⁱⁱⁱ. This disparity has both economic and health consequences that result in further division such as higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and obesity among Black Ohioans as compared to their white counterparts^{iv}.

We know that the unprecedented and unpredictable COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates these disparities as Black Ohioans are overrepresented among COVID-19 cases, associated hospitalizations, and deaths due in large part to comorbidities and disparities in social determinants of health.

While pandemic recovery has continued to be prioritized by local, state, and federal governments, the most vulnerable among us are still struggling and *equitable* economic recovery will require additional investment in health and human services. **The upcoming farm bill is a timely opportunity to do just that.**

It has now been four months since the expiration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) pandemic-era benefits, or emergency allotments. Food insecure Ohioans are making untenable tradeoffs between food and transportation, medicine, utilities, and housing. The Ohio foodbank network conducted a statewide representative survey of 2,087 emergency food distribution visitors from April 14 to May 7, 2023. This study found that more than 8 in 10 Ohioans our foodbanks serve sought help because of higher food costs. Many Ohioans are using harmful coping strategies to make ends meet – 65.5% reported that adults in their household have cut the





size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough food in the last 12 months, including 36.6% that reported doing so almost every month over the last year. More than half (54%) of the clients we serve reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless since March 2023.

Ohio foodbanks have been working day in and day out to meet the escalated need in their communities for the past 3.5 years. At the same time, foodbanks and the households they serve have been plagued with many of the same economic stressors as the ripple effects of the pandemic play out, including reduced commodities from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and corporate and retail donors, supply chain shortages and disruptions and unsustainably high costs for food and fuel.

The Ohio foodbank network relies on TEFAP to serve Ohioans who find themselves in foodbank lines. From July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, TEFAP made up 24.7% of the food that Ohio foodbanks were able to source, a total of 71,930,733 pounds of food. A year later, from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, TEFAP made up 22.9% providing just 55,496,665 pounds of food. Thankfully, foods purchased with Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds by USDA have provided reprieve, though temporary.

We are grateful for the support you provided Ohio's foodbank network and safety net programming over the pandemic. Your support of COVID-era policies, programs, and spending packages not only kept Ohio families afloat during a global crisis but Ohio distributors, partners and farmers. Unfortunately, the need is only growing as temporary policies have expired. In the first 3 months of 2023, Ohioans turned to the Ohio hunger relief network for food more than 3.1 million times (3,174,549), a record high since we began reporting statistics in 1997. Compared to the first quarter of 2022, Ohio foodbanks served 31.9% more people in the same quarter of 2023. Need is surging well beyond the record-breaking demand seen during the pandemic.

As a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, we are thrilled to learn Leader Jeffries is ensuring Caucus members and their Farm Bill priorities are heard, regardless of Agriculture Committee membership. The below recommendations have been carefully selected from a group of Black led, food, nutrition, health, social service, and environmental organizations serving the state of Ohio:

- Entitlement TEFAP funding to \$500 million (adjusted to inflation)
- TEFAP storage and distribution funding to \$200 million per year in discretionary funding
- TEFAP infrastructure grants to \$15 million per year in discretionary funding
- Boost funding for the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank program

Strengthening TEFAP will not only benefit the foodbanks in our state and our hungry friends and





neighbors, but it also will provide American farmers and producers a market surplus product to help keep them afloat.

Additionally, the recent debt-ceiling negotiations that resulted in older adults being subject to SNAP's harsh time limit will disproportionately impact Black Ohioans, especially as we are a mandatory SNAP employment and training state. Obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment requires employees to possess things that have been historically and purposely harder for Black Americans to obtain access such as education, licensing, and digital skills. Incarceration and a subsequent criminal record also disproportionately impact Black Americans, which, in turn, significantly effects their employment prospects. We ask that you draw the line at **any** new policies that would make it harder or act as a deterrent for low-income people to access the public assistance that they are entitled to and instead consider the follow recommendations to strengthen our largest and most effective federal food program:

- Eliminate three-month time limit on SNAP eligibility for certain working age adults who cannot document sufficient hours of work
- End the prohibition on use of SNAP benefits to purchase hot and prepared foods
- Increase SNAP access to low-income college students
- Protect the Biden Administration's Thrifty Food Plan re-evaluation and increase
- Allow Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories to participate fully in SNAP and extend flexibility to Native communities to administer the program
- Improve assistance to individuals seeking employment by supporting effective state employment and job training programs and ensuring people have access to SNAP benefits as they find work

Likewise, we encourage you to support and advocate for a farm bill that would challenge the root causes of unjust food systems. This includes policies that would:

- Strengthen protections against corporate power abuse and consolidation
- Expand opportunities to increase land access for urban agriculture
- Fight climate change by investing in existing conservation programs
- Ensure resources reach BIPOC producers and other historically underserved producers in an equitable manner, including sustaining and boosting the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA) that creates strong partnerships between BIPOC and other historically disadvantaged producers and the nation's emergency food network
- Provide mandatory funding for the Office of Urban Agriculture and increase funding for the Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production (UAIP) grants program to \$50 million per year



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- Maintain program accessibility by continuing to not require a match for UAIP
- Expand access to credit and reduce barriers to all USDA grant opportunities
- Build local and regional food system infrastructure
- Expand cooperative agreements for Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to service small scale and urban farmers

Thank you for your continued support of Ohio's robust hunger relief network and the people we serve. An equitable farm bill is about more than just food security. It's about a healthy economy, healthy families, a healthy workforce, and poverty alleviation. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ohio Association of Foodbanks & the undersigned organizations



ⁱ <https://devresearch.ohio.gov/files/research/P7003.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies 2023 State of Poverty in Ohio Report

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://grc.osu.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/2019%20MAS%20Minority%20Health%20Chartbook.pdf>

^{iv} <https://grc.osu.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/2019%20MAS%20Minority%20Health%20Chartbook.pdf>

