



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 2, 2020

Our Work Does Not Stop at Food Justice – It Must Include Racial Justice
Media Statement from Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the
Ohio Association of Foodbanks

“For the past 20 years, I’ve worked as the executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. Our primary mission is to provide food to people in need. Sounds straightforward, right? We get food to the people who need it. Food – the most basic human right.

“But it’s not straightforward at all. There are longstanding systemic issues that prevent equal access to food. There are whole communities without grocery stores. There are countless hoops to jump through, paperwork to fill out, steps you must take to prove you are poor enough to get help with food.

“COVID-19 has shown us even more the fragility and insufficiency of our food system. By the end of April, [more than one in five households in America](#) were food insecure. All of this is heartbreaking and unacceptable, and our foodbanks are working every day to try to fill the gaps.

“But the legislators and leaders in Ohio, and my peers at foodbanks across the country, know I don’t stop at food access. I’ve long understood and embraced that food insecurity stems from economic insecurity, and economic insecurity stems from **inequity and injustice**. They’re tied together as self-fulfilling prophecies. Children who don’t get adequate nutrition can’t learn and grow at the same rate as their peers. Parents can’t be productive workers when they’re skipping meals to put something on the table for their kids. Cheap, less healthy foods contribute to poorer health outcomes, but so does the toxic stress of scrambling every month to make rent and buy diapers and *survive*.

“And that’s why I’m releasing this statement. Because, as it turns out, food is not the most basic human right. *Surviving* is. And too many people of color are worried to the point of exhaustion every day just about *surviving*. Not just figuring out for one more day how to come up with enough food to feed themselves and their family (although people of color in America [experience wider disparities in food security](#)); not just surviving a pandemic which is [killing black Americans disproportionately](#); but surviving every day in a world where police violence and racism is raging unchecked and without justice.

“Our senior management team at the association has never just ‘stuck to hunger issues’ before, and we’re not going to start now. I’m reaffirming that we’re here to join our fellow advocates in speaking out against racial injustice and speaking up for reforms and accountability. These are big problems that take everyone lending their voice. We can’t correct the food injustices in this country while racial injustice remains.”

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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. In SFY 2019, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute nearly 230 million pounds of food and grocery items. Follow the association on [Twitter](#), stay connected on [Facebook](#) and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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