



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL ACTION NEEDED TO CURB HUNGER DURING PANDEMIC**

***Ohio's foodbanks request waivers, legislative steps, appropriations to address challenges amidst public health crisis***

**COLUMBUS** – As a global pandemic predicted to spread widely within Ohio and across the U.S., the COVID-19 outbreak has widespread implications. Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks, like many other sectors, are taking the recommendations from Governor Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton extremely seriously.

Some actions that Ohio's foodbanks are currently taking include:

- Adjusting distribution models to limit crowds and public gatherings, emphasizing drive-through pickups and appointment-based services
- Providing take-home containers to hot meal sites and other congregate feeding programs to encourage "to-go" meals and promote social distancing while meeting the needs of hungry, vulnerable populations like older adults and homeless individuals
- Packaging additional privately-funded, non-perishable foods to distribute to older adults
- Enhancing sanitizing practices within warehouses, instituting telework options where possible, and requiring waivers for volunteers to minimize spread of the virus while still addressing the need for as many hands on deck as possible to distribute additional food

"Our foodbanks are adapting to this public health crisis swiftly and expertly, thanks to their training and experience in responding in crisis and disaster," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. "But this pandemic poses serious challenges to our normal food distribution channels, as well as Ohio's broader response to food insecurity. We are urging fast, definitive action from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the USDA, Congress and the President to mitigate the rising risk of hunger amid this outbreak."

Ohio's foodbanks are urging that the following actions be taken:

- The U.S. House of Representatives should pass (and the U.S. Senate should subsequently pass) the [House Emergency COVID-19 Bill](#) introduced today, which would, among other measures:
  - Suspend the work and work training requirements for SNAP during the crisis, considering escalating economic concerns as well as public health concerns related to forcing potentially sick individuals to continue to report to work or volunteer sites
  - Provide waivers to schools, child and adult care centers and other facilities to serve meals in non-congregate settings (for example, through take-home containers or delivery)
  - Permit states the ability to request waivers to provide temporary increased SNAP benefits to address the loss of hours and wages for hourly workers without paid time off
  - Permit states additional flexibility in managing SNAP caseloads
  - Provide Crisis Response/Pandemic SNAP benefits to households with children attending schools that are closed due to this public health emergency that would have received free or reduced-price school meals if not for the closure of their school
  - Provide additional funding in TEFAP for foodbanks to meet increased demand for help with food during this emergency
  - Provide additional funding for Unemployment Compensation for workers impacted by this crisis

- The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services should approve flexible guidelines for distribution of emergency commodities through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP), including:
  - Permission to pre-package non-perishable foods to aid in no-touch distributions and limit large crowds congregating in food pantry waiting rooms
- The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) should immediately use the flexibility in its authority to move to streamline access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, including:
  - Extending certification periods to the maximum available to minimize the presence of clients in County Job and Family Services offices
  - Broadly utilizing good cause exemptions to effectively waive the requirement that Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) report to Work Experience Program (WEP) sites to maintain SNAP benefits, which are often located at local charities and places of worship
  - Coordinating data sharing with the Ohio Department of Education to prepare for provision of additional EBT cards and SNAP benefits to families with children in public schools that are closed due to this crisis and would otherwise receive free or reduced-price meals
  - Exercise all other authorities available under the President’s Major Disaster Declaration
- USDA should immediately waive verification of residency and income for TEFAP commodities, with its authority under the President’s Major Disaster Declaration

“We know that the State of Ohio is grappling with a major public health crisis,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “For the sake of the safety of Job and Family Services caseworkers, food pantry volunteers and foodbank warehouse staff, and the tens of thousands of people in need we serve every day, we urge ODJFS to immediately use every flexibility in its power to limit the need for SNAP recipients to visit JFS offices or risk reporting to work or volunteer placements while sick.”

Hamler-Fugitt also said that the foodbank network needs to adapt the food distribution model to allow for pre-packaged foods and limited paperwork and volunteer-client contact, not only to mitigate the spread of the virus, but to be able to respond to the need with a rapidly declining volunteer pool. Understandably, local companies and organizations that usually send large volunteer groups to the foodbanks to facilitate food sorting and packaging efforts are cancelling volunteer shifts en masse.

“We need our partners at ODJFS to grant us flexibility, and we need those that are least at risk for serious illness to step up and volunteer,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “I want to stress that we are taking every possible precaution to protect our volunteers, but our hunger relief network is largely reliant on senior volunteers who need to protect themselves. They’ve led the way for decades, and we’re asking those who are healthy and able to call their local foodbanks and sign up for a volunteer shift. We’re all in this together.”

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks reminds displaced workers, families, seniors and others that SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger and that they should apply for benefits either online at [benefits.ohio.gov](http://benefits.ohio.gov), by phone at 1-844-640-6446, or if necessary, in-person at their local Job and Family Services office.

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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 230 million pounds of food and grocery items. Follow the association on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ohiofoodbanks), stay connected on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ohiofoodbanks) and visit them on the web at [www.ohiofoodbanks.org](http://www.ohiofoodbanks.org).*

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