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NATIONAL DATA, LOCAL EXPERIENCE SHOW INVESTMENTS IN FAMILIES REDUCE HUNGER AND POVERTY, PROMOTE EQUITY

Key policies under consideration in federal recovery legislation proven to lessen hardship

COLUMBUS – Recently released data, including the USDA Household Food Security [report](#) and the U.S. Census Bureau’s Income and Poverty and Supplemental Poverty Measure [reports](#), show that temporary relief measures and efforts by the public and charitable sectors implemented in 2020 helped to insulate many Americans from greater hardship.

Some of the findings in these recent reports include:

- Nationwide, 10.5 percent of U.S. households reported that they were food insecure in 2020 – unchanged from 10.5 percent in 2019.
- The official poverty rate in the U.S. in 2020 was 11.4 percent, up 1.0 percentage point from 2019. This is the first increase in poverty after five consecutive annual declines. In 2020, there were 37.2 million people in poverty, approximately 3.3 million more than in 2019.
- However, the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) rate, which reflects non-wage resources like stimulus payments, unemployment insurance and programs like SNAP and school meals, was 9.1 percent in 2020. This was 2.6 percentage points lower than the 2019 SPM rate.

“It is encouraging that the historic investments made by the public, private and charitable sectors successfully lessened the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and severe economic slowdown on household food security and poverty for some Ohioans,” said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. “At the same time, it is discouraging that hundreds of thousands of Ohio households still worried about having enough to eat in 2020.”

With pandemic unemployment compensation ended, and other relief measures like SNAP Emergency Allotments, expanded SNAP eligibility for income-eligible college students and the temporarily expanded Child Tax Credit set to expire, Ohio anti-hunger and anti-poverty organizations are urging Congress to make critical permanent investments in the nation’s social safety net.

“As a Community Action Agency that operates a foodbank, Head Start centers, emergency housing, utilities programs and more in some of Ohio’s poorest counties, we are ecstatic about the possibility for once-in-a-generation investments in our families and communities,” said Claire Gysegem, spokesperson for Hocking Athens Perry Community Action. “Opportunities like expanding the Child Tax Credit and improving access to food and affordable housing can build a bright and stable future for Appalachian Ohio. The research and the resources for such solutions have existed for decades. Once we see the political power putting these solutions into action, we will also see growth and prosperity for our local economy.”

Ohio’s foodbanks have witnessed for decades the growing pressure on charitable hunger relief providers as wages and household incomes have stagnated and public investments in family-supporting programs and policies have declined. Similarly, they have seen how programs like Pandemic EBT – additional funds to help families with kids out of school afford healthy meals – reduce child hunger.

“Before the pandemic, we saw more families in need at the end of each month, when bills were due, SNAP benefits had run out and families needed help to fill gaps in their budgets,” said Julie Chase-Morefield, President and CEO, Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio. “We’ve seen this play out similarly with temporary federal relief measures. As families saw expanded Child Tax Credit and Pandemic-EBT payments in their accounts this summer, fewer households with children turned to us for emergency

groceries. Investing in basic household security through the Child Tax Credit, as well as proposals like expanded eligibility for summer meals and summer EBT, creates much-needed stability for families allowing children to grow, learn and thrive.”

Meanwhile, as food prices continue to rise and vulnerable groups, like seniors, people living with disabilities and low wage workers face impending benefit cliffs, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks is working to prepare for the next wave of increased demand.

“We’re going to see hundreds of thousands of people living on fixed incomes turning to our network for additional help in 2022 when temporary boosts to SNAP end, and we can’t procure nearly as much food as we could a couple of years ago for the same cost,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “So we’re really counting on Congress to embrace what we have all learned, and what the data clearly tells us – more resources in the hands of our families means less hardship and more hope.”

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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 2020, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 270 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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