



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 6, 2023

## **Ohio Senate Budget Would Increase Hunger Amid Record Hardship**

*Media Statement from Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director, Ohio Association of Foodbanks*

“Last week, we [released findings](#) from a study that reveal the majority of Ohio foodbank clients are being forced to choose between buying food or paying for other essential household expenses, including transportation, utilities, housing, and medicine and health care. Today, the Ohio Senate Finance Committee introduced a budget that removed the increased funding for foodbanks included in the Ohio House version of the budget, reducing the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program to level funding of \$24.55 million per year during a time of record need and sustained inflation. At the same time, the Senate added a long list of harmful changes to the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, and added a provision that would compel the Department of Medicaid to request a waiver to establish work reporting requirements for Medicaid.

“Ohioans have come to our hunger relief network for help with food more times each quarter in the past year than at any time in our history, even at the height of the pandemic. We provided take-home groceries to nearly 3.2 million Ohioans last quarter, serving 31.9% more people than in the same quarter of 2022. Nearly 60% of the Ohioans we serve are children or older adults. We cannot stabilize and support them without more help. Foodbank clients are already regularly skipping or cutting the size of meals to get by, and more than half report feeling down, depressed, or hopeless since March. Eliminating increased funding to help workers, families, older adults, disabled Ohioans and marginalized people put food on the table, when the State of Ohio has incredible resources at its disposal, is cruel and short-sighted.

“Additionally, a federal debt ceiling deal just passed that includes a variety of changes to SNAP work reporting requirements. The U.S. Congress will pass a new five-year Farm Bill this year which will establish funding, policy and regulations for SNAP. Pandemic-era SNAP and Medicaid operations waivers have ended or are ending. All of these factors and more are already contributing to long call center wait times and major challenges in applying for and receiving basic assistance. The harmful SNAP and Medicaid provisions included in the Senate budget must be removed to prevent increased hunger and potentially catastrophic system failures.

“The Ohio House included an additional \$15 million per year to support Ohio foodbanks through the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program in its budget. It included state funding to cover the cost of reduced-price meals for K-12 students in working families with low wages. Ohio House leaders and members demonstrated an ongoing commitment to not only reduce hunger and hardship, but also to support Ohio’s number one industry, agriculture, as well as our students – the future of our workforce. Unfortunately, the Ohio Senate has stripped out those investments and replaced them with punitive policies that would endanger access to critical family-supporting programs.

“We urge the Ohio Senate to rectify the wrongs included in this budget. Reinsert the funding the House already allocated for Ohio’s hunger relief network and support an amendment for an additional \$10.45 million per year, providing Ohio foodbanks with \$50 million per year to procure Ohio-grown fruits and vegetables, protein and dairy products, shelf-stable foods and essential non-food personal care and personal hygiene items. Remove the provisions that reduce access to basic help with food and health care.

“Too many Ohioans are in crisis after more than a year of high prices for food and other basic needs and the end of pandemic-era relief programs. Now is not the time to do harm – it is the time to do more to make sure they don’t slip further into instability, uncertainty and hardship.”

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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 2022, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 242 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](http://www.ohiofoodbanks.org).*

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