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Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Substitute House Bill 166, SFY2020-2021 Budget
Matt Habash, President/CEO Mid-Ohio Foodbank
June 17, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Committee, I am Matt Habash, President and CEO of Mid-Ohio Foodbank. I first wish to thank the Committee and reiterate our support for the inclusion of an additional \$5 million per fiscal year for the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program and related programs. We greatly appreciate this addition in the substitute bill as it provides needed support for efforts to combat food insecurity and underlying issues contributing to hunger.

Mid-Ohio Foodbank is the largest food relief agency in Ohio and the 12th largest in the nation, serving 20 counties from Chillicothe to Marion and Marysville to Belmont. We distributed over 65 million pounds of food last year, which served more than 524,000 Ohioans, enough food for 140,000 meals every day. Over half of the food we distribute is fresh – meat, vegetables, dairy, bread, and fruit - yet, hunger and other issues persist.

We talk about one goal at Mid-Ohio Foodbank: ending hunger. A few years ago, our Board had an epiphany. As we discussed our hunger relief efforts then and going forward, we realized we were simply meeting need and not truly working toward ending hunger. As this conversation continued, we realized hunger does not stand alone – it is tied to workforce development, housing, transportation and health care.

Food insecurity is associated with poorer health outcomes; and connecting those at risk to healthy food has a direct impact on improving health outcomes. Based off of this evidence-based assumption, we worked with PrimaryOne Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), on a pilot project connecting patients with regular access to healthy food. Because of the positive outcomes, we continue to partner with PrimaryOne Health to address food insecurity with their patients. We are now taking this work forward through additional collaborative projects. We are looking to expand our efforts to integrate nutritious food into health care and social service systems throughout our service area, and ultimately, throughout the state and will share the impact of that work with state officials.

To further illustrate the positive impact of prescribing nutritious produce for food insecure individuals and their families, I am sharing a link to an article from Fast Company where researchers at Tufts University argue that over \$100 billion in health care costs could be saved nationally through food-based prevention of chronic diseases: <https://www.fastcompany.com/90323580/prescribing-fruits-and-veggies-would-save-100-billion-in-medical-costs>.

Much of our fundraising and direct support comes from leading business enterprises in our service area. These visionary leaders recognize that hunger is detrimental to the community and to their bottom lines. These savvy thought leaders know that hunger compromises our educational system; depreciates our competitive workforce; and, afflicts our healthcare system. By providing food through a comprehensive approach, we can successfully work toward a pathway for our customers to support themselves and to work, live and thrive within our communities.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for your time. And, thank you for your support of anti-hunger efforts, especially the additional funding provided in HB166.

We at Mid-Ohio Foodbank are happy to answer questions or follow up with additional information on our services. I also urge each of you to visit your local foodbank to see how their operation functions and to learn more about what we are doing toward ending hunger. Thank you.