



FAN updates

February 11 2021 | News & Updates from the Foodbank Advocacy Network

Advocacy Resources:

Access [advocacy resources and FAN updates](#) here; or, for federal advocacy information, visit the [Feeding America](#) and the [Food Research and Action Center](#) (FRAC) advocacy sites.

Find your [elected official's contact information](#).

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Did you know that:

- For every \$1 donated, Mid-Ohio Food Collective can provide enough food for about 4.5 meals?
- For every \$1 donated, Mid-Ohio Food Collective can provide up to \$9.50 in groceries?
- Mid-Ohio Food Collective provides enough food for more than 170,000 meals-per-day?

The past year was unlike any most of have encountered. Following is a look at the events of 2020, what has already occurred in 2021 and issues that lie ahead.

Governmental relief: emergencies and waivers

Our response in 2020 would not have been possible without the assistance of partners and supporters, including government at all levels:

- Federal, state and local emergency declarations allowed Mid-Ohio Food Collective to move in a week's time from a choice pantry model to a no-touch system, ensuring safe delivery of essential food and personal items.
- Deployment of the Ohio National Guard to Ohio's food banks resulted in 100 soldiers initially deployed to MOFC. The Guard, from deployment in late March through the end of the year contributed over 75,000 hours of time in place of the volunteer program. There remains approximately 50 soldiers currently onsite. In light of an 80 percent decrease in volunteer hours due to the pandemic, this support was crucial.
- Regulatory waivers allowed MOFC to provide food in non-congregate school settings as students increasingly moved to remote learning. Likewise, SNAP eased requirements to ensure newly eligible and existing customers maintained maximum access to nutritious food. In all, dozens of regulatory waivers and declarations eased the delivery of food to hungry families, seniors, school children and homeless individuals.

MOFC Advocacy Response

Throughout the year, MOFC's team pivoted to respond to the pandemic:

- Electronic COVID Leadership Briefings were held for our 20-county service area, facilitating discussion on our response and the ongoing increase in hunger with Congressional, state and local elected leaders, as well as other non-profits, school personnel and our agency network. These supplemented calls and electronic communication with elected leaders.
- MOFC staff at various times hosted the Lt. Governor, Senator Portman and Congressman and Ohio National Guard Brigadier General Steve Stivers, who spent a morning working in the onsite pantry to assist customers. Advocacy staff worked with Congresswoman Joyce Beatty and her staff on COVID funding issues. Governor Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine teamed with MOFC for several video messages encouraging Ohioans to donate and support food bank efforts.
- President/CEO Matt Habash testified virtually before the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Nutrition Oversight & Department Operations, chaired by Cleveland Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, on the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program's Farmers to Families Food Box Program (CFAP) and our experience with it. You can watch the testimony [here!](#) In advance of the testimony, Greg Ibach, Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) visited Mid-Ohio Foodbank to get feedback about the CFAP program, our operations, facilities and programs we have in place to serve the community.
- On a separate note, MOFC secured an unexpected advocacy win. The state's Capital Bill, funding infrastructure projects, was initially delayed as it did not appear any new appropriations would be granted. However, as state finances stabilized amidst large spending cuts, the Ohio Legislature and Governor enacted a larger-than-anticipated Capital Bill that includes \$1 million of state funding for Mid-Ohio Farm on the Hilltop to implement numerous technologically-based initiatives!

Census

Throughout the pandemic was completion of the decennial census – which, for the first time in history, moved to largely no-contact collection methods. Ohio finished with a 70.7 percent self-response rate, ahead of the national 67 percent rate and second only to Michigan amongst surrounding states. The non-response follow-up rate for Ohio was 29.2 percent, bringing Ohio into line nationally with an approximate 99.9 percent response rate. Overall, Ohio ranked 12th in the nation for self-response, surpassing the 2010 rate. While legal challenges to census methodology and final data were mounted, the effort closed and is awaiting certification by Congress to be used for federal funding allocation and Congressional apportionment. Throughout the Census operations, Mid-Ohio Food Collective partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau and other non-profits to drive engagement to ensure everyone had the opportunity to be counted; thank you to our partners in these efforts!

Elections, Issues and the Current Climate

Kudos to Columbus' Congresswoman Joyce Beatty who was elected to chair the Congressional Black Caucus, a powerful position on the national stage! Kudos also to Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown on his appointment as chair of the influential U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs!

Lima saw a power surge in the state legislature as residents Matt Huffman was elected Ohio Senate President and Bob Cupp Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives.

Mid-Ohio Food Collective provided voter registration information and forms along with updates throughout the election cycle, which proved especially critical as Ohio joined the nation in seeing record numbers of absentee ballots cast.

It is worth mentioning that the elections and experience of 2020 will shape 2021 as multiple members of the Ohio Legislature contracted the coronavirus and the scandal of illegal payments associated with passage of House Bill 6 hangs over the legislature.

We cannot omit the discourse in 2020 on racial inequality and subsequent unrest. Mid-Ohio Food Collective remains committed to ending hunger and all forms of inequity; to do so requires addressing underlying social issues, including the elimination of racism and all social determinants of health that hold too many neighbors captive in poverty.

The Biden Transition

All eyes centered early on D.C. for the Biden Presidential transition. Within hours of being sworn in, the new President began a series of Executive Orders and regulatory actions. First out of the gate was a freeze on all new and pending rules passed in the final days of his predecessor, a loud warning bell of what was to come. More action quickly followed in the early days of January with Orders and directives on racial equity, renter eviction moratoriums, raising the minimum wage, immigration and the SNAP program.

Under the President's direction, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) announced rescission of two rules still pending from the previous administration to limit SNAP benefits via broad-based eligibility and the SNAP Utility Assistance Program. USDA is also reviewing multiple aspects of the SNAP Program, seeking to enhance provisions from the federal budget and COVID relief bills. This includes to extend the 15 percent increase in benefits and to allow states to increase SNAP emergency allotments; and, increase benefits under another aid program, the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT), which gives students money for food. To view rule proposals from the new Administration, visit <https://www.federalregister.gov/index/2021#letter-H>; to view Executive Orders, go to <https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/joe-biden/2021>.

The new Administration is quickly taking shape. Cleveland Congresswoman Marcia Fudge was named Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), signaling an aggressive change in policy for the often-maligned department. Thomas Vilsack, USDA Secretary in the Obama Administration, returns to the same post under President Biden, with a developing team that includes Stacy Dean as Deputy Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNS), which oversees nutrition programs such as SNAP. Dean most recently served as vice president for food assistance policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a leading national ally in anti-poverty and food insecurity issues. Katharine Ferguson, who has previously worked at USDA and for Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, is USDA chief of staff. Additional appointments include Sarah Bleich, a nationally-recognized expert on diet-related disease and food insecurity and racial inequality, as senior advisor for COVID-19; and, Kmar Chandran, who has worked in the anti-hunger field, as senior advisor for nutrition.

U.S. House and Senate

In Congress, David Scott of Georgia becomes the first African-American Chair of the Agriculture Committee while Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan takes over the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. Full committee memberships are still being allotted, but Ohio has traditionally had seats on these powerful committees.

Major pending activities in the legislative branch are two issues: the impact of the ongoing pandemic and the split Senate and narrowed House margins. Late in December, budgets to fund the federal government through the next fiscal year ending September 30, 2021, were finally enacted, followed by another stimulus package. Federal lawmakers and the Administration will work on the next federal budget while continuing to respond financially to the pandemic. MOFC, in tandem with Feeding America and the national network of food banks, will seek increases in TEFAP funding and SNAP allocation levels and reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, the backbone of many of the school and child feeding programs.

Ohio: Budget, Medicaid and COVID-19

At the state level, 2021 is a budget year; Governor DeWine submitted his proposal in February and the Ohio Legislature will work to finalize the document prior to the end of the state fiscal year June 30. Working with the Ohio Association of Food Banks, MOFC advocacy staff will seek increases in hunger relief and social support programs as record numbers continue to seek assistance.

As with the federal level, committee chairs and memberships are in process of finalization. One of the biggest questions for the new General Assembly is how well the supermajorities in the House and Senate work together and with the Governor; or, will there be intra-party jockeying for power?

The Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCO) program was put out for re-bid in 2020 with an eye to selection of participating health insurers prior to year-end. The process has carried into 2021 and announcements are expected in February of companies that have been selected. We will continue our work with the Ohio Department of Medicaid and the MCOs to further incorporate hunger relief and other social determinants of health into the Medicaid system.

Coordination of COVID-19 testing and vaccination will continue between the state and local levels as federal relief funds continue to be distributed. Response to the civil unrest of 2020 also continues as a major priority at all levels of government.

As always, watch for more news and updates to come; and on half of the Mid-Ohio Food Collective advocacy staff and all of One Team – best wishes for 2021!