

For more updates on the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's response to COVID-19, please visit www.greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/give-help/donate-food-funds/covid19

**Greater Cleveland Food Bank
COVID-19 Update
March 26-27, 2020**

We continue to roll up our sleeves every day and experience continual awe and gratitude for all of the people who come into our collective lives during this time of trauma, fear and hope – yes, hope!

Our senior leadership team meets each day. Today, we talked about additional resources that will be needed in the days and weeks ahead, including a larger location for our drive thru distributions, potential offsite storage, and increasing the capacity of our current phone system. **We received 800 calls in one day this week when we typically receive 100.** Regardless, anyone in need should call our Help Center at 216-738-2067 to find the nearest pantry location. We still have several hundred that are operational and ready to meet the need!

This morning, we also updated our Advocacy Committee on our COVID-19 response efforts and the significant challenges associated with having to collect personal information, including private income information, from our clients while practicing social distancing. We saw this first hand last week at our drive through distribution. Imagine a Food Bank employee asking an 82-year-old woman, in the front seat of her car, to yell a bit louder with her address and monthly income so it can be heard from a safe distance over the sounds of a crowded parking lot and a line of cars three miles long. It embarrasses the senior, slows down distribution, and poses a safety risk if the employee, out of an abundance of kindness, leans in to provide the senior with privacy or to hear her better.

In partnership with the Ohio Association of Food Banks, we have asked the Governor to waive these requirements for the distribution of food from the state and federal government for the time being. At a time when one third of the clients coming to our drive through distributions are new, collecting this data slows the process and is in direct conflict with social distancing recommendations. Our Advocacy Committee, led by board member John Corlett, the President and Executive Director of the Center for Community Solutions, is jumping to action to support this request.

Our traditional methods of distribution are being turned on their heads as we have to think about a whole new paradigm of getting food out – folks who are homebound, kids not in school, and more. Our Backpacks for Kids program is growing: next week, we will begin providing children picking up meals at Parma schools with bags of child friendly food for evenings or weekends, along with emergency food boxes for families as needed. Parma is a community with high unmet need for food, even before this crisis, so we are happy about this collaboration.

We've been communicating online with one of our most treasured group of supporters – our volunteers. They continue to raise their hands to help – and although we've had to ratchet back our numbers due to social distancing, they remain top of mind. If you've ever been in our lobby on a busy day, you can understand why we miss seeing them day to day – they are long-time supporters who feel like family! We are reviewing our volunteer situation week by week and we are thrilled that they remain flexible and willing to meet our needs.

We'd be remiss if we didn't once again share our need and concern about the expenses associated with this work. We were thrilled and grateful that our community stepped up and we met the most recent \$100,000 match in 26 hours. When the going gets tough, the tough - our community - gets going! As this crisis continues, the projected number of emergency food boxes increases so too are the expenses associated with that food. So, when asked by friends, acquaintances, rich uncles - -what they can do to help - point them to www.greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/give

In closing, I have often quoted one of our wise senior leaders who said that we all need to be "comfortable with the uncomfortable" as we face new challenges. However, we never want to be comfortable with or try to digest the pain and fear in people's voices as they call in for help or see it in their faces as they wait in line for hours for a week's worth of food. This is a tough time but knowing that our community has our back, gives us the grit to meet each day with resolve.