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Senate Finance Committee
SB247 Proponent Testimony
Presented by Darold Johnson,
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Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley and Ranking member Skindell, I am Darold Johnson, Legislative Director for the Ohio Federation of Teachers. OFT represents 20,000 members who are teachers, paraprofessionals and nurses in Ohio's public schools, high education faculty and staff, and public employees who provide vital services to families and communities across our state. On behalf of our members and the children and families they serve, I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today about Senate Bill 247.

I am here to talk about the Summer Food Program. The Summer Food Program provides meals to youth up to 18 years old whose family income is less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level, or up to \$26,208 a year for a family of three. Reduced-price meals are available to students with household incomes up to 185 percent of poverty — \$37,296 a year for a family of three.

According to Children's Defense Fund Ohio, in 2014 nearly 1 in 4 (22.9 percent) of Ohio's children were poor. More than 807,000 kids are eligible for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program for low-income families. Ohio ranked 36th in child poverty among states. More than 89 percent of Ohio children receiving a free and reduced-price lunch during the school year **did not** participate in Summer Nutrition Programs – ranking Ohio 37th of 50 states in ensuring that children have adequate summer nutrition.

The Food Research Action Center, using United States Department of Agriculture data, reported that more than 638,719 children participated in free or reduced-price school meals daily in Ohio in 2013, just 68,752 children participated in federally-funded summer meals programs daily last summer. Compared to other states Ohio ranked 38th. We must do better.

Most summer feeding sites are located at schools and most summer meals include some academic programming - the biggest barrier to participation is the lack of locations. Hungry children experience academic losses. We also know that most children living in poverty receive most of their nutrition through the school meals program during the school year.

SB 247 requires a school district board of education that opts not to comply (for financial reasons) with a requirement to offer summer food services to permit an alternative summer meal sponsor to use a school facility if at least one-half of the students in the facility's attendance area are eligible for free lunches.

Federal changes have simplified participation of the summer food program and its time Ohio take action, as the Governor has stated nationally, to act on behalf of the least of these, hungry children. SB 247 has had input from a variety of stakeholders and interested parties. It has also received bipartisan co-sponsorship.

On a personal note, I have advocated for expansion of the summer food program for more than 20 years in various capacities. I have seen children participating in these programs experience academic gains because of this program. Hunger doesn't take a vacation and this committee should move SB 247 quickly as summer is coming in just a matter of weeks. This body and the legislature can make next summer even brighter by opening more locations.

This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions you may have.