



Testimony: SB: 247 (Brown/Lehner)

(Use of Schools as Summer Meal Sites)

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Chair Oelslager and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Mary Lynn Foster and I am the President and CEO of Children's Hunger Alliance. Children's Hunger Alliance is Ohio's statewide non-profit agency focused on the issue of childhood hunger. I am before you today supporting the approval of SB-247, which was jointly introduced, appropriately at Thanksgiving time, by Senators Brown (D-Toledo) and Lehner (R-Kettering).

During the academic year Ohio's hungry school children can access a nutritious breakfast or lunch at school through the federally reimbursable School Meal Program. About 75% of Ohio's free/reduced-price eligible children regularly eat a school lunch, but what happens during the summer when school is out? Surely hunger does not take a vacation, too?

Although about 75% of program-eligible children regularly eat a school lunch, less than 11% of these same children participated in a summer meal program during summer 2014 (as reported by the Food Research and Action Center in the agency's recent report: ***Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation***). This participation rate places Ohio at 38<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in terms of the number of children participating in summer meals versus those participating in school lunch.

By this measure, the District of Columbia has the highest ratio of summer meal participation at 59 summer meal participants per 100 school lunch participants. The District is followed by New Mexico, New York, Vermont and Connecticut. Ohio's neighboring states of Indiana and Pennsylvania are ranked 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, respectively, with almost equal participation rates of about 20 per 100.

Nationally, slightly more than 16 children are accessing a summer meal for every 100 children accessing a school lunch. National hunger advocates have set an intermediary goal of 40 children eating summer meals for every 100 children eating a school lunch.

What can be done in Ohio to increase summer meal participation from 11% of eligible children to the national goal of 40%? Children's Hunger Alliance believes that part of the solution is to increase access to summer meal programs.

Children's Hunger Alliance's 2014 *Ohio Summer Nutrition Scorecard* reported data indicating that no summer meals were served in 14 of the state's 88 counties. In an additional 25 counties, three or fewer children participated in summer meals for every 100 children eating a school lunch.

Nationally, Congress has legislation before it that would help providers who offer school-year afterschool meals seamlessly transition to also offering a summer meal. Two years ago, the efforts of Senators Brown and Lehner, Ohio's Common Sense Initiative, and the Ohio Department of Education resulted in a change in school transportation rules that now permits a child to eat on a school bus provided the bus is stationary. As a result, it is now possible, but not required, for school buses to be used as mobile summer meal sites.

The Ohio Department of Education serves as the coordinating agency in Ohio for the various federal child nutrition programs: approving sponsors, processing claims, monitoring compliance, etc. Based upon information publically available on the Ohio Department of Education's website, during summer 2015, Ohio had 1,550 summer meal sites, operated under the federal Summer Food Service Program, where hungry children could access a federally reimbursable, nutritious meal. These sites, located in high poverty areas, represent a slight increase over the number of sites available during the previous summer (1523). More than 160 sponsors, approved by the Ohio Department of Education, operated these programs.

Although Ohio's public schools, particularly elementary schools, often are the center of their neighborhood, only about 250 of the 1550 Summer Food Service Program sites this past summer were located within schools, and only about half of these programs were operated by a school system. The other programs were operated by approved outside sponsors such as YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and parks and recreation departments.

SB 247 focuses on schools located within high-poverty neighborhoods. It does not require the public school system to become a sponsor of summer meals. However, if a school district elects not to offer a summer meal program at a school in a high-need neighborhood, and there is an approved outside provider who wants to offer such a program, the district would need to permit such use.

It is important to note that not just any potential meal provider would have to be permitted to use the school facility – the sponsor must be an Ohio Department of Education approved summer meal provider.

It is also important to note that SB-247 seeks to ensure that schools do not incur any additional expenses by making their facility available. The bill permits schools to charge a reasonable fee to cover costs associated with making the facility available, such as the cost of custodial services and the use of school equipment. In addition, SB-247 seeks to protect the school district from potential liability that may be associated with the operation of the program by requiring sponsors to either have liability insurance or become a named insured under the district's policy.

Increasing the access of hungry children to summer meals clearly has the social benefit of ensuring that hungry children receive nutritious meals. There is a growing body of evidence that points to the positive impact summer meal programs can have on a child's school year academic progress.

Finally, because the meals served under the Summer Food Service Program are federally reimbursable, there is an economic benefit as well. The Food Research and Action Center has estimated that increasing Ohio's summer meal participation to the 40% national interim goal would allow Ohio program sponsors to draw down more than \$14 million dollars per year in additional federal reimbursements – tax dollars coming back to the Ohio economy. Thus, facilitating an increase in participation in the federal summer meal program offers Ohio social, academic and economic benefits.

Since its introduction an amendment has been proposed by the Department of Education which seems to standardize certain terms in the bill with the terms utilized in summer food service program. In addition to amendment proposes to move notification of approved summer food service program sponsors from a paper copy to an electronic posting on the Department's website. Children's Hunger Alliance is supportive of these changes and urges their inclusion in the bill.

Thank you for your consideration of CHA's comments. Children's Hunger Alliance, Ohio's meal sponsors and our hungry children hope that you will support approval of this legislation.

At this time I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.