



State Rep. Kent Smith
8th District
Education and Career Readiness Committee
HB 80 Testimony
March 7, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for House Bill 80 which will feed hungry Ohio children during the summer months when they are not in school.

As was mentioned by my cosponsor, House Bill 80 would allow school districts to make their school facilities available to an approved food service provider if more than half of their students qualify for free or reduced meals.

As background, the threshold for free meals is 130% of the federal poverty guidelines and for reduced meals it is 185% of the federal poverty guidelines. These calculations are based on family size and income level and are made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Recent data from the Food Research and Action Center's *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation* report indicates that over 850,000 school-aged children in Ohio are eligible for free and reduced price meals through the federal School Meal Program. Although more than 75% of eligible Ohio children access school lunches during the academic year, the Food Research and Action Center reports that fewer than 11% of these same Ohio children access meals through nutrition programs during summer months when they are not in school.

There is other data that suggests Ohio is in need of House Bill 80. In June 2016, the Food Research and Action Center released their *How Hungry is America* report which listed the national, state and local index of food hardship. Ohio had the 11th worst food hardship rate (tied with North Carolina) among the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

When examining this data by metropolitan statistical areas (MSA), Ohio cities again have higher than average rates of food hardship. According to the report, the Youngstown area is 7th among the top 109 U.S. MSA's for food hardship rate, Dayton is 11th, Toledo is 36th, Cincinnati is 43rd, Cleveland is 48th, Columbus is 53rd and Akron is 55th. All of our urban centers are in the top half of United States cities for their rate of food hardship.

If there is some good news in the *How Hungry is America* report it would be the following. One of the five recommendations to reduce food hardship, poverty and hunger is this – Expand Nutrition Programs. That is exactly what House Bill 80 would do.

As a bit of history, this Committee passed this legislation, SB 247, unanimously in the last General Assembly but in the furry and flurry of the lame duck session somehow this legislation did not become law. We can begin to fix that oversight today and by doing so we can begin to fix child hunger in Ohio today.

Thank you for allowing myself and Rep. LaTourette to bring this issue before the Committee. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.