



TESTIMONY OF LISA HAMLER FUGITT
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Education and Career Readiness Committee

OHIO HOUSE BILL 80

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Good morning Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Slaby, Ranking Minority Member Fedor and distinguished members of the Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding House Bill 80. My name is Lisa Hamler Fugitt, and I am executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, which is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger. Our members are the state's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and supplemental food partners. Through this statewide network we deploy comprehensive hunger relief in all 88 Ohio counties.

I want to start with a foundational position – Ohio as a state should be doing all it can to prevent childhood hunger. On that I know we all agree. 25 percent of our children – or one in four Ohio children – live in a household designated as food-insecure. These children do not always know where their next meal will come from, and that is simply unacceptable, especially in a state as rich in agriculture and food production as our state is.

I commend Representative Sarah LaTourette and Representative Kent Smith for their leadership on this important issue. House Bill 80 provides a mechanism to help address one of the most pervasive challenges of childhood hunger – assuring that hungry children have access to nutritious food in the summer months when school is not in session. It takes a mountain of resources to meet this challenge – and our association knows better than most that there is no single solution.

During the 2015/2016 school year 747,125 students qualified to receive free and reduced priced meals, representing 42 percent of all students. These vulnerable kids have available meals through the free and reduced-price meals programs within the school. School lunches are critical for hungry students, because they are a consistent source of nutrient-rich, protein-rich food for kids who may not otherwise regularly eat. With a healthy meal, children are best positioned to grow, learn and thrive – in their education and in their overall lives.

Summer presents the greatest risk for these children – because they miss these meals provided at school. That is why the federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and administered in Ohio by the Ohio Department of Education, works to ensure that children from low-income households continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session.

Through this program, a diverse and dedicated group of sponsors, including local government agencies, schools, and faith-based and nonprofit organizations, provide meals at locations in their communities. Unfortunately, only about one in 10 children in Ohio who rely on free and reduced-price meals during the school year accesses the SFSP in one of these sites.

For decades, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, our 12 foodbanks and the more than 3,300 non-profit, community and faith-based organizations in our network have been working to effectively address barriers to childhood hunger. We partner with the Ohio Department of Education and Share Our Strength to host a Summer Food Service Program Summit each year to help promote best practices among SFSP providers. We advocate for better policies that feed more Ohio children more effectively.

Three of our member foodbanks sponsor and operate the Summer Food Service program, preparing and distributing over 15,000 meals per day.

We leverage resources to expand the reach of the Summer Food Service Program in Ohio. And we work to fill the gaps that currently exist in the SFSP to reach more vulnerable kids.

Along the way, we've learned some things about those we serve. While the SFSP is a critical tool in our resource toolbox, it has its limitations. The most pressing of those is that because of the way the program is currently legislated, children must be able to travel to SFSP locations and consume meals on-site.

This presents an enormous challenge for many children. Kids that live in rural, isolated areas often don't have transportation to get to their nearest SFSP site, if there is even an SFSP site in their county. Parents that live in unsafe neighborhoods often may not feel comfortable allowing their child to cross busy streets or walk on dangerous roads. Adverse weather keeps all kids from getting to nearby meal sites, and no meals can be sent home to eat over the weekend. And so these families face a real struggle, with extremely limited resources, to put three nutritious meals on the table for their kids, through the summer break.

I'm proud to share with you that we're meeting this challenge head-on, through innovative programs that work. Beginning in 2012, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks began to partner with Governor John R. Kasich, the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and the Ohio Department of Education to operate three innovative, state-funded programs to fill some of the gaps left by SFSP.

Our Summer Weekend Meals Program provides kid-friendly, shelf-stable meals for children attending SFSP sites to take home to eat over the weekend. About 10,000 children received meals to take home each weekend for 10 weeks, for a total of about 600,000 weekend meals.

To meet the unique needs of participating children in Ohio's rural areas who don't have access to traditional summer food service programs, our Summer Rural Delivery Meals Program provided a week's worth of kid-friendly, shelf-stable meals to about 2,800 children each week for 9-10 weeks. In total, this program provided 277,200 meals to kids in need.

There is no substitute for the value of fresh fruits, vegetables and protein foods for our children. And that's why our Mobile Farmers Market program was developed for families with children in both the weekend and rural meals programs. This innovative effort provided more than 860,000 pounds of nutritious food at an average cost of \$0.0881 per 3-ounce serving.

I share these stories with you because we know from experience that innovation works – and innovation is the only viable solution to assure Ohio's hungry children have access to nutrition during the summer. And as you consider the merits of House Bill 80, I encourage you to look at it as one more tool in the toolbox – one more innovative way to get food to kids in need.

This legislation has some hurdles to cross – things like assuring schools find the right, reputable food service provider partners; providing full funding so that financially challenged districts do not have to bear the costs of summer food service; or helping these partners recognize their significant responsibility for these children and for the school facilities with which they are entrusted.

Quite simply, we can't afford to NOT consider approaches like House Bill 80. Ohio's hungry children are spread across the state, in urban environments, in rural areas, and in our suburbs and small towns. When they can't get to us, we must get to them.

House Bill 80 provides one more way to accomplish that – another way to feed our children in schools they know and trust, to have sites in neighborhoods that are closer to home, and to do so at no cost to already-strapped districts. For that reason alone, I urge this Committee to continue robust, swift hearings that advance this measure in time to meet this summer's critical need of Ohio's hungry children.

Thank you, and I'll be glad to take any questions you may have.