



Testimony: SB 54
(Use of Schools as Summer Meal Sites)
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Good morning Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, my name is Judy Mobley and I am the Interim CEO and President for the Children's Hunger Alliance. Children's Hunger Alliance is a statewide non-profit agency focused on the issue of childhood hunger in Ohio. I am before you today supporting the approval of Senate Bill 54 which is jointly sponsored by Senators Brown (D-Toledo) and Lehner (R-Kettering).

During the school year Ohio's food-insecure children have access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school through the federally reimbursable School Meal Program. About 75% of Ohio's children that are eligible for free or reduced-price meals regularly eat a school lunch. This simply isn't the case when summer break arrives. These children lose access to the meals they have depended on throughout the school year.

Although approximately 75% of program-eligible children regularly eat a school lunch, only 10.1% of these same children participated in a summer meal program during summer of 2015 (as reported by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) in the agency's recent report: *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation*). This participation rate ranks Ohio at 40th 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 52% summer meal participants per 100 school lunch participants. The District is followed by New Mexico, Vermont and New York. Ohio's neighboring states of Indiana and Pennsylvania are ranked 16th and 13th, respectively, with participation rates of about 18 summer participants per 100 lunch participants.

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 10% of eligible children to the national goal of 40%? Children's Hunger Alliance believes that part a big part of the solution is to increase access to summer meal programs. Based on Ohio Department of Education data, there are 10 counties in Ohio which did not claim Summer Food Service Program meals in 2015.

Through the efforts of Senators Brown and Lehner, the Ohio's Common Sense Initiative, and the Ohio Department of Education, a change in school transportation rules now permits a child to eat on a school bus provided the bus is stationary. As a result, it is now possible for school buses to be used as mobile summer meal sites. We supported some of these mobile feeding sites in the Toledo area last summer providing meals 5 days a week to children in need.

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 publicly available on the Ohio Department of Education's website, during summer 2016,

Ohio had more than 1,800 summer meal sites, operated under the federal Summer Food Service Program, where hungry children could access a federally reimbursable, nutritious meal. 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 230 of the 1800 Summer Food sites this past summer were located within schools, and only about half of these programs were operated by the school system. The other programs were operated by approved outside sponsors such as YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and parks and recreation departments.

SB 54 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 sponsor who wants to offer such a program, the district would need to permit use of their building. It is important to note that not just any potential meal provider would 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 54 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 54 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 access to summer meals for hungry children clearly has the benefit of ensuring that hungry children receive nutritious meals. There also is a growing body of evidence that points to the positive impact summer meal programs can have on a child's academic progress, specifically when paired with enrichment programs that help reduce summer learning loss. According to FRAC, low-income children are likely to return to school in the fall further behind their higher-income peers. Providing healthy meals can serve as an incentive to increase student attendance at summer enrichment programs.

Finally, because the meals served under the Summer Food Service Program are federally reimbursable, there is an economic benefit as well. FRAC 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 \$15.2 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.

The bill before you today is identical to SB 247 from the last General Assembly which passed the Senate unanimously in May, with 30 co-sponsors including Senate President Faber. Just last week, the House introduced companion legislation, House Bill 80 which was introduced with 17 co-sponsors. The bill also has the support of Ohio's major school organizations, the Ohio Council of Churches, as well as the Human Service Chamber of Franklin County and the Children's Defense Fund of Ohio.

Chairman Coley and Committee members. I would urge your swift passage of Senate Bill 54 to allow for increased access to summer meals for Ohio's food insecure children.

Thank you for your consideration of Children's Hunger Alliance's comments. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

