

Proponent Testimony for SB 54

Chair Coley, Ranking Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of SB 54 and to speak to its impact on our state's children. My name is Brandi Slaughter and I am the CEO of Voices for Ohio's Children, a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization, focused on improving the well-being of children in our state.

Ohio is the home of more than 2.6 million kids and, at Voices, we strive to give all of them a voice in the public policy process. Because, while priorities and issues change from one General Assembly to another and from this budget cycle to the next, children's needs remain the same. They need a loving family and support system, nourishing meals, access to high-quality healthcare, safe neighborhoods, quality schools, engaging community activities, and a variety of college and career options.

SB 54 is a straight-forward piece of legislation that addresses a very straight-forward problem: Ohio kids are not getting enough to eat. In fact, one in four Ohio children live in homes that have been designated as food insecure. Research suggests that these children will start kindergarten academically behind their well-nourished peers because hunger and malnutrition impair the brain's ability to learn.

That is why school lunch programs are so important. This year, nearly 750,000 of Ohio's 1.8 million school-aged children—more than 40 percent—qualified for the federal free and reduced lunch program. Free lunches — and breakfasts where available — are reserved for children in families with annual incomes less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level, or below \$26,546 a year for a family of three. For households between 130 and 185 percent of the federal level (\$37,777 for a family of three), reduced-price meals are available for students.

These programs provide dependable, nutritious meals for these vulnerable kids during the school year. But, what happens in the summer? The kids are just as hungry, yet only one in ten takes advantage of the Summer Food Service Program. Part of the problem is location. There were more than 1,800 Summer Food sites last summer, but only 230 of them were centrally located in the schools—venues not only easy to get to, but also trusted and known by both the students and parents. For the schools, the problem is the cost of providing the additional food and labor. School districts are technically required to extend their school meal programs into the summer. But, if the costs are prohibitive, they can opt out; so many do.

SB 54 relieves both of these issues by enabling already-approved private Summer Food Service Program providers to use school facilities as a place to produce the meals and serve families. School kitchens and cafeterias are already equipped for mass meal production and service and the providers are already funded to provide the meals. The bill focuses on districts where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals, but not SNAP. So, the program reaches those children who truly need it. The goal of the program is to raise the rate of children participating from one in ten to four in ten.

safe

healthy

educated

connected

employable

Columbus Office: 33 North Third Street, Suite 420
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 221-5204
info@raiseyourvoiceforkids.org



**Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee
Written Testimony of Brandi Slaughter,
CEO of Voices for Ohio's Children
March 22, 2017**

I urge you to support this legislation and to give Ohio's children the nourishment they need, not just for their bodies, but for their minds as well. Summer meals, when combined with enrichment programming, can give these children the boost they need to overcome summer learning loss and start the next school year healthy and ready to learn.

Thank you for your consideration. By working together, Ohioans can ensure a positive future for our families and our state. I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

safe

healthy

educated

connected

employable

Columbus Office: 33 North Third Street, Suite 420
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 221-5204
info@raiseyourvoiceforkids.org