

TACKLING CHILD HUNGER IN OHIO:

WHAT'S WORKING AND HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?

July 2014

CO-RELEASED BY:



EXAMINING THE EXTENT
OF THE HUNGER CRISIS
FOR OHIO CHILDREN,
AND THE IMPLICATIONS
OF FOOD INSECURITY

WHO WE ARE

ABOUT VOICES FOR OHIO'S CHILDREN

To build a greater community, we must begin with greater kids. Voices for Ohio's Children helps ensure that the needs of Ohio's 3 million children are prioritized at the local, state and federal levels. Our advocacy plays a big role in educating and influencing the community and public officials about sound public policies that help children succeed.

OUR MISSION

Voices for Ohio's Children advocates for public policy that improves the well-being of Ohio's children and their families by building nonpartisan collaborations among the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

OUR VISION

is for children's interests to be at the top of every community's agenda so all of Ohio's children are poised for success.

ABOUT OHIO ASSOCIATION OF FOODBANKS

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2013, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute over 173 million pounds of food and grocery items. The association also serves as the home of The Ohio Benefit Bank and operates the state's largest navigator program for the Affordable Care Act.

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DEFINITION

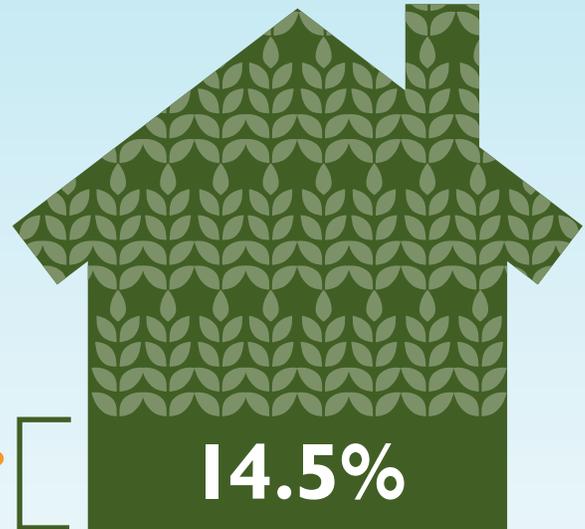
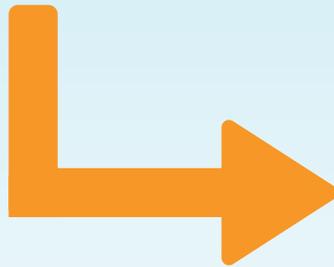
FOOD IN·SE·CU·RI·TY

(noun) as defined by the United States
Department of Agriculture (USDA)

“ LIMITED OR UNCERTAIN
AVAILABILITY OF
NUTRITIONALLY ADEQUATE
AND SAFE FOODS OR LIMITED
OR UNCERTAIN ABILITY
TO ACQUIRE ACCEPTABLE
FOODS IN SOCIALLY
ACCEPTABLE WAYS (E.G.,
WITHOUT RESORTING TO
EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES,
SCAVENGING, STEALING, OR
OTHER COPING STRATEGIES.”³

FOOD INSECURITY IS MEASURED ON A SPECTRUM FROM LOW FOOD SECURITY (INDIVIDUALS REPORT REDUCED QUALITY, VARIETY, OR DESIRABILITY OF DIET), TO VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY (INDIVIDUALS REPORT MULTIPLE INDICATIONS OF DISRUPTED EATING PATTERNS AND REDUCED FOOD INTAKE).⁴

17.6 MILLION
HOUSEHOLDS
IN THE U.S. ARE
CLASSIFIED AS
FOOD INSECURE.



Introduction

The United States is a developed nation, producing enough food to feed every person here. Yet 17.6 million households (14.5 percent) in the U.S. are classified as food insecure.¹ Hunger is a symptom of poverty. Among the nation's 76 cities with total populations of 250,000 or more, three Ohio cities rank in the top five for the percent of children who are poor.² All over the nation, children face limited access to the food they need to live a healthy and active life. And because of this, millions of children and families, and society as a whole, must deal with the expensive cognitive, behavioral, educational, economic, and health consequences that follow. While there are many programs and resources in place for food insecure children, stronger support for these programs and innovative approaches are needed to address Ohio's hunger crisis.

This brief examines the extent of the hunger crisis for Ohio children, and the short and long-term implications of food insecurity for children, their families and our communities. We review some of the resources available to Ohio children and families at the local, state, and federal levels, and consider opportunities available for continued support and improvement.

National Stats

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) monitors the extent of food insecurity across the United States through an annual survey administered by the USDA's Economic Research Service.⁵ In 2012, approximately 17.6 million (14.5%) households in the United States were food insecure.⁶ For households with children, however, the average was higher—approximately 7.8 million (20%) households with children were food insecure.⁷ Among households with children, approximately 3.9 million (10%) households had food insecure children, with 1.2% having very low food security among children.⁸ In total, this meant that in 2012, 8.3 million children in the United States lived in households in which one or more child did not have access at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life, and 977,000 children lived in households in which one or more child reported disrupted eating patterns or reduced food intake.⁹

In Ohio, There is an Even Larger Crisis...

OHIO IS NOW TIED FOR THIRD IN THE NATION FOR THE HIGHEST RATES OF "VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY."

Over the past decade Ohio's food insecurity rate has steadily increased¹²—from 2010 to 2012, an average of 16.1% of households in Ohio faced food insecurity,¹³ a rate higher than the national average within the same time period.¹⁴ In that same time period, 7.1% of households in Ohio faced very low food security.¹⁵

CURRENTLY:
OHIO IS RANKED
10th
IN THE NATION
FOR FOOD INSECURITY.¹⁰



Implications of Child Hunger

Food insecurity has been linked to a number of devastating consequences among children, due to their increased vulnerability during times of critical physical and cognitive development.

Cognitive & Socio-emotional Development:

For very young children, chronic under-nutrition that may accompany food insecurity harms cognitive development during critical periods of rapid brain growth by “changing the fundamental and neurological architecture of the brain and central nervous system.”¹⁷ Consequently, food insecure infants and toddlers are two-thirds more likely to be at-risk for developmental delays.¹⁸

Studies have also shown a correlation between food insecurity among students and increased anxiety,¹⁹ hyperactivity, and lower psychosocial

functioning²⁰ than their food secure peers. Food insecurity has shown to be positively associated with both externalizing (e.g., temper tantrums, displayed aggression, and fighting) and internalizing behavioral problems (e.g., depression and loneliness) in young children.²¹ Additionally, these negative effects continue as the child grows—elementary-age children who are food insecure are twice as likely to have seen a psychologist and have been suspended from school,²² and have increased internalizing behavioral problems.²³

Educational Achievement & Performance:

Research shows that hungry children are twice as likely to repeat a grade and twice as likely to receive special education services as their food secure peers, greatly increasing the cost of their education.²⁴ Additionally, research shows that children from food insecure households have significantly lower reading and math scores.²⁵

Hungry children have been shown to have difficulties concentrating within the academic environment, with lower levels of school readiness.²⁶ Hunger in school-age children has also been linked to increased absenteeism and tardiness,²⁷ and lower levels of school engagement.²⁸

FOOD INSECURITY
AMONG CHILDREN
CAN IMPAIR
COGNITIVE
DEVELOPMENT,
EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT
AND LEAD TO
INCREASED
HEALTH ISSUES.¹⁶

Health:

Food insecurity has also been linked to a number of short and long-term health consequences for children. Because food insecurity dramatically increases the likelihood of dietary deficiencies, preschool age children living in food insecure households are more likely to suffer from dental disease and are 140% more likely to develop iron-deficiency anemia.²⁹ Additionally, food insecurity is a major cause of immunodeficiency, with food insecure children nearly twice as likely to be in fair or poor health and suffering from infections and acute illness more frequently than their peers with adequately nutritious diets.³⁰

Young children from food insecure homes are also 3.4 times more likely to be obese by the age of 4.5.³¹ The correlation between obesity and poverty is even stronger. A national study of

more than 40,000 children found that children from lower income households had more than two times higher odds of being obese than children from higher income households.³² Not only do limited resources often limit food choices (as fresh fruits, vegetables, and low fat proteins are some of the most expensive grocery items) but the experience of living with food insecurity or in poverty can work to change behaviors, resulting in overeating when food is available or using food as a coping mechanism for dealing with stressors.³³ The environments of poor children can also contribute with less access to safe recreational activities or full service grocery stores.³⁴ Obesity is in turn highly correlated to a number of additional health problems, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, and joint degeneration.³⁵

Economic costs:

Communities may also feel the consequences of food insecurity across the state. Annually, food insecurity costs the U.S. \$130.5 billion in illness-related costs, \$19.2 billion in poor educational outcomes and lower lifetime earnings, and \$17.8 billion in charitable contributions directed towards addressing the consequences of food insecurity.³⁶ This number does not include the costs of federal nutrition assistance programs. In Ohio, hunger cost over \$6.97 billion in 2010, including

costs related to increased health costs, lost educational attainment, and diminished productivity.³⁷ Included in the cost analysis are increased hospitalization rates as a result of the health consequences of food insecurity. Compared to their food secure peers, children between the ages of 0-3 living in food insecure households are one-third more likely to have a history of hospitalization,³⁸ with an average cost of \$12,000 per pediatric hospitalization.³⁹

IN OHIO, HUNGER
COST OVER
\$6.97 BILLION
IN 2010, INCLUDING
COSTS RELATED
TO INCREASED
HEALTH COSTS,
LOST EDUCATIONAL
ATTAINMENT,
AND DIMINISHED
PRODUCTIVITY.

Available Resources

To address the issue of food insecurity, in particular among children, a number of programs and resources have been made available at the federal, state, and local levels.

Federal Level:

A majority of food-insecure households rely on federal food and nutrition assistance programs that are administered by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).⁴⁰ Of the 15 domestic food and nutrition programs offered by FNS, the three largest are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and National School Lunch Program (NSLP).⁴¹

SNAP: SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, SNAP provides eligible households with food-purchasing assistance through the use of an electronic benefit transfer card.⁴² SNAP operates to benefit low-income and vulnerable populations—82% of benefits go to households with children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities.⁴³

In an average month in fiscal year 2013, SNAP provided benefits to 47.6 million people across the United

States, with an average benefit of about \$133 per person.⁴⁴ In Ohio, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services administers SNAP benefits to households with incomes at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL).⁴⁵ In fiscal year 2012, approximately 1.8 million individuals in Ohio participated in the SNAP program, for a total of \$3 billion in provided benefits.⁴⁶

SNAP works in conjunction with the SNAP-Ed program to teach families and kids about healthy eating and cooking. SNAP-Ed provides nutrition education to children and parents.⁴⁷ Much of SNAP-Ed funding goes to schools so that teachers and nutrition professional can teach children about healthy eating. Other programs help parents to learn how to shop for food and cook healthy meals on a limited budget. With our country working to combat childhood obesity

IN FISCAL
YEAR 2012,
APPROXIMATELY
1.8 MILLION
INDIVIDUALS IN
OHIO PARTICIPATED
IN THE SNAP
PROGRAM, FOR A
TOTAL OF
\$3 BILLION
IN PROVIDED
BENEFITS.

rates SNAP-Ed is a vital tool that works with the SNAP program to combat both hunger and obesity.

Children's Health Watch found that SNAP, like an effective immunization, significantly decreases families' and children's food insecurity, which are established health hazards. Additionally, compared to young children in families that were likely eligible but not receiving SNAP, young children in families receiving SNAP were less likely to be underweight or at risk for developmental delays.⁴⁸

WIC: SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN

WIC provides supplemental food, and nutrition education for eligible pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women and children up to the age of 5. In Ohio, WIC is administered by the Ohio Department of Health to households at or below 185% FPL. In fiscal year 2013, there were

263,683 WIC participants in Ohio,⁴⁹ receiving an average monthly benefit of \$35.78.⁵⁰ Among states, Ohio's average monthly benefit to families is sixth lowest in the nation.⁵¹ The low WIC benefit levels can explain, in part, why there is a need for additional supports to families like the Cincinnati Children's Hospital's Keeping Infants Nourished and Developed (KIND).⁵² KIND provides additional resources and infant formula to families in need through community partnerships.⁵³ Unfortunately, resources like KIND are not available in many other Ohio communities as food insecurity rates for children and their families continue to remain high.

NSLP: THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

NSLP provides cash subsidies to participating public and private school and residential child care institutions, to allow eligible children to receive free or reduced-price lunches.⁵⁴ In 2013, the program served an average of 30.6 million kids in the U.S., with the majority of the lunches being served for free or at a reduced price.⁵⁵

IN FISCAL YEAR 2013, NEARLY:



1.1 MILLION

OHIO CHILDREN
PARTICIPATED IN
THE NSLP PROGRAM.⁵⁶



172 MILLION

NSLP MEALS SERVED⁵⁷

Similarly, schools may participate in the School Breakfast Program (SBP), which provides cash assistance to states to operate free and reduced-price breakfast programs.⁵⁸ In fiscal year 2013, approximately 423,000 Ohio children participated in the School Breakfast Program,⁵⁹ with approximately 68 million meals served.⁶⁰

Schools in Ohio and across the country are currently implementing updated school food standards in NSLP and SBP so that the meals that children receive are healthier.⁶¹ For low-income children the school meals program could potentially provide the only nutritious meal that a child receives all day. These changes will make the school food environment healthier for all children, including low-income children. Unfortunately the additional six cents reimbursed to schools for purchasing healthier food was offset with cuts to SNAP in the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010.⁶² These across-the-board cuts took effect in November 2013 with repercussions to Ohio children's health and well-being still occurring.

SFSP: SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

NSLP meal programs can extend beyond the school year, through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The SFSP is administered in Ohio by the Ohio Department of Education and implemented by around 192 sponsors in 1,556 sites in 2013.⁶³ The SFSP provides federal reimbursements for meals to low-income children when school is not in session. In 2013, an average of approximately 60,000 Ohio children were served daily at participating food sites,⁶⁴ with approximately 3.7 million meals served.⁶⁵ While the SFSP is highly valuable to children who can access it, 13 Ohio counties had no SFSP sponsor in 2013; 46,933 children in these largely rural counties were potentially eligible for the program.

**IN 2013, THE SFSP WAS IMPLEMENTED BY AROUND
192 SPONSORS IN 1,556 SITES—PROVIDING
FOR APPROXIMATELY 60,000 OHIO
CHILDREN SERVED DAILY.**

TEFAP: THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Under TEFAP, food is provided by the USDA to Ohio and distributed to qualifying Ohioans through local food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters.⁶⁷ In state fiscal year 2013, TEFAP supplied 31 million pounds of food through Ohio foodbanks to community emergency food providers.⁶⁸

CACFP: CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM

CACFP makes meal reimbursements available for child care centers, Head Start programs, outside-school-hours care centers, and other institutions licensed to provide day care services. Administered by the Ohio Department of Education, CACFP reimburses centers for free or reduced-price rate eligible meals or snacks provided to income-eligible participants.⁶⁹ In fiscal year

2013, approximately 123,000 Ohio children were served daily through the CACFP,⁷⁰ with approximately 64 million meals and snacks served.⁷¹

FFVP: FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAM

FFVP provides a fresh fruit or vegetable snack to low-income elementary school students. FFVP helps schools provide fresh fruits and vegetables to kids so that they can become more aware of vegetables and fruits and increase children's access to fresh fruit and vegetables with no significant increase in their daily calorie intake.⁷² Nationwide over 3 million low-income elementary students receive a fresh fruit or vegetable snack through the program. And according to USDA, Ohio schools received over \$4.6 million to purchase fruits and vegetables in the 2013-2014 school year.

**DURING THE
2013-14
SCHOOL
YEAR:**



\$4.6 MILLION

**RECEIVED FROM FFVP
FOR USE IN OHIO
SCHOOLS**

State & Local Level:

State and Local Level: In addition to the administration of the federal food and nutrition assistance programs, state and local resources are available for food insecure households.

FOODBANKS PANTRIES, SOUP KITCHENS AND SHELTERS

Federal nutrition programs condition eligibility on household income. A gap exists, however, for the 33% of food insecure children in Ohio that do not meet the eligibility cut offs.⁷³ Ohio's emergency food assistance network works to close that gap. Through a combination of public and private funds and donations, foodbanks and pantries across the state work to address the food needs of hungry Ohio children. Ohio has 12 Feeding America foodbanks, distributing food to approximately 3,300 local food pantries, soup kitchens, and hunger relief agencies serving every county of the state.

In state fiscal year 2013, Ohio foodbanks distributed over 173 million pounds of food, a total value of \$223 million, to local pantries and hunger relief agencies.⁷⁴ Over 34% of visits made to pantries

were for children, while over 44% of all the households served by the emergency food assistance network had children in them.⁷⁵ A unique example of successful public-private partnership is the state-funded Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP). OFPACP is a public-private partnership that directs surplus agricultural products from more than 100 Ohio farmers, growers, and producers to Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks. The program also provides fresh and shelf-stable foods to Ohio foodbanks. The program is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, with funding provided by the Ohio General Assembly. In 2013, over 20% of all food distributed by Ohio's Feeding America foodbanks was secured and distributed through OFPACP.⁷⁶

Two types of supplemental child nutrition programs offered by foodbanks that work to meet the nutritional needs of children specifically are Kids Cafe and Backpack Programs. Kids Cafes provide free meals and snacks to low-income children at a variety of community locations. In

DURING STATE FISCAL YEAR

2013:



OF VISITS MADE TO PANTRIES WERE FOR CHILDREN.

2013, Kids Cafe programs served an average 4,122 children a day through partnerships with over 100 schools, after care, and community organizations.⁷⁷

Backpack programs provide at-risk children with food to eat over the weekend, when school meals are not available. In 2013, over 13,000 were served through school year Backpack programs in Ohio.⁷⁸ The Governor's Summer Weekend Meals Program operates in the summer months with the Innovative Delivery program providing 11 meals for the week and weekend. This unique partnership between the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio's foodbanks and Summer Food Service Program sponsors served over 11,000 children over the summer of 2013.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Food insecurity is also addressed at the state and local levels through community collaborations.

One such collaboration is the **Farm to School Program**, which provides school children with fresh, locally grown or raised food. The USDA provides \$5 million in mandatory funding each year for

the Farm to School Program, awarding grants to states to support a range of activities, including training and developing partnerships, planting school gardens, and purchasing equipment.⁷⁹ Three grants, over \$160,000 in total, were awarded to Ohio for fiscal year 2014.⁸⁰

Another example of promising community collaboration aimed at tackling food insecurity, is **Hunger.FOOD.Health**, a collaboration between The Ohio State University's Food Innovation Center (FIC) and the Mid-Ohio Foodbank (MOF). The Hunger.FOOD.Health initiative was established to "inform priority areas and collaborations necessary to build sustainable, viable, healthy, and food secure environments in Central Ohio."⁸¹ Through this initiative, experts in social work, public health, nutrition, crop science, medicine, policy, and business, will work together to increase food security in vulnerable populations.⁸²

BACKPACK PROGRAMS PROVIDE AT-RISK CHILDREN WITH FOOD TO EAT OVER THE WEEKEND.

CHECK OUT THESE LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Food-and-Nutrition/National-School-Lunch-and-Breakfast/Farm-to-School-Initiative>

<http://fic.osu.edu/initiatives/food-security>

Strengthening Funding & Program Potential

Programs and resources available at the federal, state, and local levels have resulted in millions of meals for food insecure children. To continue this success and to truly address the needs of Ohio's hungry children, we must act to make sure that funding for successful programs is, at a minimum, strengthened. Additionally, we must pursue new opportunities to increase participation in food assistance programs and ensure that children have access to nutritious food all year long.

The Need to Strengthen SNAP Benefits:

One area of recent concern has been the across-the-board reduction of SNAP benefits for Ohio families. As discussed earlier, the federal government plays a critical role in food assistance—nearly three-fourths of the USDA's entire operating budget goes to nutrition and food assistance programs.⁸³ Research shows that SNAP is an effective program for reducing food insecurity and very low food security for households with children.⁸⁴ Yet Ohio families report their SNAP benefits last only two and a half weeks out of every month. For this reason, increased federal funding for SNAP benefits is critical.

On November 1, 2013, the temporary boost provided to SNAP through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) ended nine months early, despite a sluggish recovery and continued high food prices.⁸⁵ These cuts impacted approximately

792,000 children in Ohio, with an estimated overall loss of \$142 million to households with children, from November 2013 to September 2014.⁸⁶ As a result, the average family of four saw their benefits reduced by \$36 a month, translating into an average of \$1.40 per person, per meal in 2014⁸⁷ and a loss of 21 meals per month.⁸⁸ With over 1.8 million SNAP recipients in Ohio, these cuts resulted in a loss of over \$83,000,000.00 from October 2013 to February 2014 alone.

In addition to benefit cuts following the early sunset of the ARRA, both the House and Senate passed legislation last year as part of the 2013 Farm Bill process that proposed cuts to SNAP. Under the Senate version, SNAP benefits were proposed to be reduced by \$4.1 billion over the next 10 years.⁸⁹ In comparison, the House bill proposed SNAP benefits to be cut by nearly \$40 billion over the same time period.⁹⁰ On

**INCREASED
FEDERAL
FUNDING FOR
SNAP BENEFITS
IS CRITICAL.**

January 27, 2014, the House passed a compromise bill, cutting SNAP benefits by \$8.6 billion over the course of 10 years.⁹¹ This legislation, The Agriculture Act of 2014, was passed by the Senate in early February and signed by President Obama and became law on February 7, 2014.⁹²

In the passed legislation a provision known as “heat and eat,” was affected. “Heat and eat” allows states the option of considering anyone who received the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefit to qualify for a utility deduction which would raise SNAP benefit levels. This change is estimated to impact about 850,000 households in 15 states and D.C. While Ohio did not make use of the provision, the state no longer has the option to, despite recent brutal winters and high heating costs taking from the food budgets of low income families.⁹³

In addition, the SNAP program has been targeted for cuts outside of the regular reauthorization process that was completed in February. For example, Ohio recently chose not to accept the statewide USDA waiver available to states with high unemployment rates. Childless SNAP participants in 72 of Ohio’s 88 counties are now required to work, volunteer or undergo job training for at least 20 hours a week or lose their food benefits despite a scarcity of jobs, a lack of volunteer and job training sites

and barriers like transportation, low literacy levels, and others. This creates a significant burden on both recipients and Counties, who administer the program.⁹⁴ It is imperative that federal lawmakers protect and strengthen the SNAP program in other legislative vehicles so that there are no further cuts to SNAP, which could lead to significant increases in hunger.

A promising demonstration by USDA shows the impact of additional food dollars on child food security. Through the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) demonstration program administered by USDA and implemented in ten states and tribal organizations, the USDA tested the delivery of an additional \$60 per child in SNAP or WIC food dollars to low-income children during the summer months.⁹⁵ These additional food dollars successfully reached 75 percent of eligible children and reduced the prevalence of very low food security among children by about one-third, an incredible achievement. The SEBTC is regarded by many advocates as a promising model for ending childhood hunger as part of the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

**JANUARY 27, 2014:
THE HOUSE
PASSED A
COMPROMISE
BILL, CUTTING
SNAP BENEFITS
BY \$8.6 BILLION
OVER THE
COURSE OF
10 YEARS.**

Increasing Participation in Food Assistance Programs and Encouraging Year-Long Access to Food:

A number of programs exist to assist children facing food insecurity, but large numbers of eligible children are not participating and large numbers of communities do not offer these programs. This is particularly true for the School Breakfast Program and the Summer Food Service Program.

In School Year 2012-2013, about 51% of Ohio children who participated in free or reduced price school meals also participated in the School Breakfast Program.⁹⁶ The Ohio Department of Education has promoted a number of different strategies to increase school breakfast participation, including breakfast in the classroom, breakfast after first period, and breakfast on the go.⁹⁷ Studies indicate that many benefits exist for students who eat breakfast, including: fewer vitamin deficiencies, less likelihood of experiencing chronic illness, increased academic performance, higher attendance rates, and increased potential economic productivity.⁹⁸ By urging school districts to investigate and adopt new strategic breakfast policies, we can facilitate easier access to breakfast for a larger number of hungry children.

In February of 2014 USDA released guidance to schools regarding use of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

that was included in Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act, for which Ohio served as a pilot state.⁹⁹ CEP allows schools that have at least 40% of their students qualifying for free meals to serve free meals to all students without having to collect applications from all students. Schools calculate their free school meal reimbursement rates through programs such as SNAP and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. CEP helps schools increase participation in the child nutrition programs by offering breakfast and lunch for free to all students. CEP will go a long way in reducing administrative work for school districts by eliminating the need to qualify students for free and reduced-price meals individually. Ohio's schools have led the nation in adopting CEP with 303 adopting the provision during the 2012-2013 school year.¹⁰⁰

In addition to school breakfast and lunch participation, we must also increase access to summer food assistance programs. In 2013, only less than one in ten of eligible children participated in the Summer Food Service Program.¹⁰¹ Ohio must continue to be cognizant of the roadblocks that prevent easy access to food during the summer months, such as transportation issues,¹⁰² and adopt policies that push food out to those food

**ABOUT
51%
OF OHIO
CHILDREN
WHO PARTICIPATED
IN FREE OR
REDUCED PRICE
SCHOOL MEALS
ALSO PARTICIPATED
IN THE SCHOOL
BREAKFAST
PROGRAM.**

insecure children across the state, rather than requiring children to meet the attendance needs of programs.

While the SFSP serves only a fraction of Ohio children who participate in free and reduced price school meals, recent USDA demonstration projects have shown promising results in increasing participation at SFSP sites. Ohio's summer backpack demonstration provided sponsors with funds to supplement traditional SFSP food with take home to cover the days that SFSP were not available.¹⁰³ In Ohio, total meals served at participating sites increased by 35.8 percent compared to a decline of 12.3 percent at comparison sites.¹⁰⁴

Recognizing the importance of a stable source of nutrition for children, Ohio's Governor John R. Kasich has provided funding through the Governor's Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives and in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education and SFSP sites to allow the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to provide kid-friendly, shelf-stable meals for children attending summer food sites to take home over the weekend. This funding has provided weekend meals to about 10,000 children each week for 10 weeks during the summer months. Beginning in the summer of 2013, the Governor's Office has also supported mobile market distributions and innovative meal delivery programs to children in rural areas.¹⁰⁵

In an effort to further support SFSP sponsors, for the past several years the

Ohio Association of Foodbanks has partnered with the Corporation for National and Community Service to host AmeriCorps Summer Associates working to increase participation in the SFSP. Summer Associates are national service members who give eight weeks of service to SFSP sites, doing outreach, organizing activities, preparing meals, and mentoring Ohio children all summer long. In 2014, the association will be partnering with 30 organizations and hosting 74 members, while there have been requests for 120.¹⁰⁶

Finally, food security should not end when the school bell rings. Children need stable access to 21 nutritious meals a week. While the CACFP provides federal funding for the reimbursement of meals and snacks given to low-income children by eligible after-school care programs, more support is needed for weekend-only meal programs. During the summers of 2011 and 2012, the USDA implemented a Backpack demonstration program in Ohio, but federal funding for the project ended in 2013.¹⁰⁷ Though state and local foodbanks and pantries provide weekend meals to hungry children, these programs are not currently supported by federal funding in Ohio.¹⁰⁸ Increased funding at the federal level designated for weekend meal programs and flexibility with program structure so that CACFP meals do not need to be consumed on-site would promote consistent access to food resources for children throughout the entire week.

SUMMARY:

FOOD SECURITY
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Over a quarter of Ohio's children face each day with the threat of hunger.

For many of these children, the fear is not confined to wondering what they may be able to eat, but wondering IF they will be able to eat. Even in times of great economic struggle and uncertainty, Ohio's children and all children in the United States should have access to the nutritionally adequate and safe foods they need to live a healthy and active life.

At the same time, sustainably ending childhood hunger means substantially decreasing the alarmingly high poverty rates for households with children and the communities in which they live. Federal safety net programs can play a crucial role in lifting children out of poverty. The Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit lifted 5.3 million children out of poverty in 2012 while the SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) lifted 2.2 million children out of poverty.¹⁰⁹ Investing in the ability of children to concentrate at school with access to a stable source of meals is a huge first step and a choice worthy of a civilized society.

While funding exists at the state and federal level for food and nutrition services, it hasn't been adequate to meet the need.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS MUST BE EXPLORED.

New programs, initiatives, and regulations must take into account the specific needs of Ohio's food insecure families, and work towards framing more proactive solutions to Ohio's hunger crisis. Not only do our children depend on this, but so does our society, which greatly benefits from a healthy and productive future workforce.

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Voices for Ohio's Children advocates for public policy that improves the well-being of Ohio's children and their families by building nonpartisan collaborations among the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. Our vision is for children's interests to be at the top of every community's agenda so all of Ohio's children are poised for success. To build a greater community, we must begin with greater kids. Voices for Ohio's Children helps ensure that the needs of Ohio's 3 million children are prioritized at the local, state and federal levels. Our advocacy organization plays a big role in educating and influencing the community and public officials about sound public policies that help children succeed.