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KICK-OFF EVENT LAUDS VALUE OF SERVICE, COLLABORATION IN FIGHTING SUMMER HUNGER
Public-private partnerships to reach tens of thousands of hungry Ohio kids

COLUMBUS – The federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was designed to provide free, nutritious meals to children who normally count on free or reduced-price school meals during the school year. While the program works well in some communities, it's costly to operate and comes with bureaucratic challenges and limitations. About 9 in 10 eligible Ohio children don't participate, often because they don't have transportation to get to an SFSP site or because there isn't a Summer Food Service Program site near them at all. The Ohio Association of Foodbanks partners with the Ohio Department of Education to increase access to and participation in SFSP, but it also seeks out strategies to fill the gaps left by SFSP.

"It may seem counterintuitive, but food insecurity worsens during the summer months," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director at the association. "Students in low-income families no longer have access to free or reduced school meals. Working parents suddenly have to afford child care for their school-aged children in their budgets. We look for opportunities to counteract those financial burdens."

On Monday, the association welcomed Congressman Troy Balderson to the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, where he administered an oath of service to 65 new AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates. Thanks to a partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service, the association has deployed these national service members in communities across Ohio to help combat childhood hunger this summer.

"It's inspiring to see our community organize to combat an issue which affects 1 in 5 students across Ohio: food insecurity," said Balderson. "I applaud those who today committed themselves to making a difference in our community."

At the kick-off event, those gathered also heard remarks from Michele Reynolds, director of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Her office will partner with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks once again in summer 2019 to operate the Governor's Summer Meals Programs, which are intended to address some of the gaps left by the federal Summer Food Service Program.

"Governor DeWine has championed children throughout his career," said Reynolds. "He is proud to continue to support innovative summer meals programs that will reach underserved kids in rural Ohio and help thousands of families make ends meet during the summer months."

In summer 2018, AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates serving with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks helped their host sites serve 420,000 summer meals to Ohio children at-risk of hunger, in addition to harvesting 16,000 pounds of produce and recruiting 460 volunteers. The Governor's Summer Meals Programs distributed 600,000 weekend meals for children participating in SFSP, 484,000 meals to children in rural areas without access to SFSP, and 1.1 million pounds of fresh produce to participating children and their families. Learn more about these initiatives to fight childhood hunger in the summer [here](#).

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About the 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 3,500 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2018, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute over 216 million pounds of food and grocery items. The association has also served as the home of The Ohio Benefit Bank since 2006. Follow the association on [Twitter](#), stay connected on [Facebook](#) and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

Contact: Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, Executive Director for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks
614-271-4803 (cell) – or – lisa@ohiofoodbanks.org