



**Brian Riendeau, Executive Director
Dare to Care Food Bank**

**Testimony before the Senate Agriculture Committee
To review Child Nutrition Programs
May 7, 2015**

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and members of the committee:

Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Brian Riendeau and I am the Executive Director of Dare to Care Food Bank in Louisville, Kentucky. I am honored to represent Feeding America's network of food banks and agencies that, like colleagues here today, work daily to address child hunger in our country. Dare to Care Food Bank is one of 200 food banks in Feeding America's network that helps combat hunger and food insecurity across the United States. Together, we serve more than 46 million people in need, including 12 million children, through 58,000 food programs including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, afterschool and summer feeding sites for children, and other programs.¹ Dare to Care Food Bank serves more than 300 agencies across a service covering 13 counties in North Central Kentucky and Southern Indiana. Our service area spans nearly 4,000 square miles and includes urban, suburban and rural areas.

My remarks today will address the critical role federal summer and afterschool feeding programs play in addressing child hunger throughout the year. While I will focus on these two federal programs, I in no way intend to diminish the importance of meal programs that serve children in child care and during school, or pregnant women, infants and toddlers served through the WIC program. I will discuss the role Dare to Care Food Bank and other food banks play in addressing child hunger in communities through innovative public-private partnerships. From our experience operating summer and afterschool programs for more than a decade, as well as experiences of partner food banks across the country, I will address challenges and barriers we face in reaching more children and offer policy solutions that will help communities ensure more children have the nutrition they need throughout the year when they are out of school.

It is important to note that making real progress toward ending child food insecurity and ensuring opportunity for all of our nation's children will require investing new resources toward increasing access, particularly during times when children are out of school like summer. Incremental change is not enough and an investment in funding child nutrition programs is an investment in our children's health and education and a productive competitive future workforce that will pay dividends in years to come.

¹ Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014*, National Report. August 2014.

Background

Though not always visible, child hunger remains a significant problem in the United States. Millions of families do not have the resources to purchase the food that they need. In most of these families, parents protect children from hunger. Though their children may not get the nutritional quality or variety that they need for proper health and development, parents reduce their own portion sizes or skip meals to protect children from actual hunger pangs. In fact, a recent Feeding America study found that as families in my home state of Kentucky struggle to make ends meet, 88 percent of households that access charitable food programs report purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food to make ends meet.²

The number of children living in food insecure households rose 33 percent in the first year of the recession and has hardly abated since.³ Over one in five children in America (21.4 percent) now lives in a household that struggles to put food on the table.⁴ In Kentucky and Indiana, it is estimated that more than 500,000 children live in households facing food insecurity, uncertain where their next meal will come from. In the 13 counties served by our food bank, 19.6 percent of children are estimated to be food insecure – that’s more than 57,000 children.⁵

As shown in Feeding America’s annual *Map the Meal Gap* study and as we witness in our daily work, child food insecurity exists in every county in the nation but can look different from one community to the next. Child hunger is particularly pervasive in rural areas. Across the United States, 62 percent of the counties with the highest child food insecurity rates are rural, even though rural counties comprise only 43 percent of all U.S. counties.⁶ Although many rural areas may experience child hunger at a higher rate, urban areas can be home to larger numbers of hungry children and may face challenges addressing the sheer number of children in need of assistance.⁷ For Dare to Care Food Bank, Jefferson County alone – which includes Louisville, Kentucky – accounts for nearly 60 percent of the estimated 57,500 food insecure children across our 13 county service area.

Regardless of where families live, we know that food insecurity is particularly detrimental for children. They are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of food insecurity and the long-term consequences can be more severe. Poor nutrition and episodes of hunger subject children to increased health risks and impaired cognitive development. These challenges are even more difficult during the summer months when low-income children do not have access to school meals. In the summer months, research shows that hunger for families with school age children increases by 34.2 percent and that most children – particularly children at high risk of obesity – gain weight more rapidly.⁸

² Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014*, National Report. August 2014.

³ Household Food Security in the United States, 2013. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2014, Table 1B. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err173.aspx#.VCDiqBakveg>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gundersen, C., A. Satoh, A. Dewey, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2015: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2015. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/mapthegap>

⁶ Ibid. Table 11.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Von Hippel, P.T., B. Powell, D.B. Downey, and n. Rowland. 2007 The effect of school on overweight in childhood: Gains in children’s body mass index during the school year and during the summer vacation. *American Journal of Public Health* 97 (4): 796-802.

Fortunately, the United States has a robust and complementary set of federal child nutrition programs to protect children from hunger and promote improved nutrition and health. Since their implementation in the 1960s, federal child nutrition programs have been successful in reducing the hunger and extreme malnutrition that we saw in the United States several decades ago.

Forty years ago this year, Congress authorized a nationwide summer meals program to ensure children do not go hungry during the summer months when school meals are no longer available. Today the Summer Food Service Program is providing more than 160 million meals to children in need, preventing child hunger for many during the summer months.⁹

Child nutrition programs are only effective when they reach the children who need help. In particular, programs targeting children during out-of-school times, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which serves children afterschool meals and snacks, fail to reach the majority of children in need of food assistance.

In recent years, anti-hunger advocates, schools, community based groups, health professionals, and other stakeholders have built strong partnerships with the USDA and private funders to strengthen participation in the Summer Feeding Service Program by encouraging more community organizations to sponsor summer feeding sites and by increasing awareness of the program to boost enrollment at current sites. Since 2007, the number of sites offering summer feeding has grown by more than 30 percent.¹⁰

This year, Kentucky was fortunate to be selected as a USDA target state. This year we are working with our partners, the Kentucky Department of Education, and regional office to coordinate summer programs and meet our goal of serving 1,760 more meals. Since 2013, 16 states have received technical assistance through these efforts from the department and national charitable partners to increase the number of sites and children reached during the summer months.

However, the summer gap remains considerable despite the significant investments made over the history of the program. For example, our neighbors in Arkansas received support for 2013 through the USDA technical assistance and experienced the largest growth in the country, more than doubling participation to 41,946 children reached.¹¹ However, while nearly all communities are eligible to operate an open summer feeding site, only 23 percent of children that received free or reduced priced school lunch received a summer meal last year. In 21 states, less than 15 percent of low-income children that received a school lunch accessed a summer meal in 2014.

Kentucky, Indiana, and Arkansas are not the only states that have faced significant barriers to reaching children during the summer months. Nationwide, less than 4 million children received food assistance through a summer feeding program last year. That is only about 18 percent of the kids that rely on free or reduced-price school lunches during the school year.

⁹ Summer Food Service Program Data, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pd/03sfsmeals.pdf>.

¹⁰ Summer Food Service Program Data, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pd/sfsummar.pdf>.

¹¹ Summer Food Service Program Data, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pd/04sffypart.pdf>.

In fact, summer feeding provides the most striking access gap among the federal nutrition programs. While some families have access to summer feeding sites in their communities, the majority do not. The current summer feeding model requires children to consume meals at a designated feeding site. For reasons discussed below, it can be difficult to operate a site-based model during the summer, so there are far fewer access points during the summer than during the school year.

Our nation could do much more to reduce child hunger and malnutrition simply by reaching more children during the times when they are not in school. The reauthorization of child nutrition programs in 2015 provides the important opportunity to make good programs even better through policy updates that will improve access to quality child nutrition programs and ensure no child goes hungry.

Summer and Afterschool Program Success

The Dare to Care Food Bank and the broader Feeding America network has a long standing commitment to serving food insecure children when they are out of school – after school, on weekends and holidays, and during the summer. Across the country, an increasing number of food banks operate afterschool and summer congregate feeding programs, and many are also expanding their operations. In 2014, 79 food banks operated afterschool programs through CACFP and 100 offered summer programs through SFSP, a 27 and 33 percent increase respectively since 2011. During that time, meals provided through afterschool programs increased by 84 percent to 11.7 million meals while summer meals served increased by 63 percent to 5.7 million meals.

The Dare to Care Food Bank, and our colleagues across the country, could not do the important work of combatting child hunger without the federal Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. We see both of these programs as two of the strongest public-nonprofit partnerships in the fight to end hunger in America. The programs leverage the commitment, resources, and local expertise of community providers and educators. Sponsors and sites that operate summer and afterschool feeding programs raise awareness within the community, deliver and distribute food, usually daily, and also run enrichment activities. While the federal government provides meal reimbursement for every qualifying meal or snack provided to eligible children, the program would not be feasible without the huge commitment made by our communities. Without the reliability of funding that SFSP and CACFP provides, we would not be able to hire staff or make commitments to sites that serve low-income communities.

Summer and afterschool feeding sites are made possible by strong collaborations on the ground. Summer camps, schools, Boys and Girls clubs, Parks and Recreation centers, YMCAs, United Way organizations, food banks, and other community and faith-based organizations work together to ensure sites are available in high-need areas and that low-income families know that the program exists and where to find a site. We work with our schools, local businesses, volunteers, and state and federal agencies who are all passionate about ensuring kids have the nutrition they need to learn, grow, and thrive. In the Feeding America network alone, food banks served more than 5.7 million SFSP meals at more than 3,200 sites across the country in 2014.

At the Dare to Care Food Bank, during the school year we serve as a sponsor through CACFP and provide food to 24 afterschool program sites in 3 counties and reach over 1,000 children a day. We started working with afterschool meal programs in 1993 at a site we still work with today. We primarily serve Jefferson County, which includes the city of Louisville, and nearby areas in surrounding counties. During the

summer, Dare to Care Food Bank serves as a summer feeding sponsor and this coming summer of 2015 we will provide meals to 24 sites across 3 counties in our service area. Most of our afterschool program sites continue through the summer.

Our meals are offered in YMCA's, Boys and Girls Clubs and community centers in impoverished areas. Children who visit our partner sites will not only receive a nutritious, warm meal, but they will have a safe alternative to being on the streets, they can access mentors, tutoring, athletic programs and just be kids and hang out with their friends. Many of the children walk to these sites and spend most of their out of school time at these locations.

In addition to the congregate programs that are reimbursed through CACFP and SFSP, Dare to Care Food Bank has secured private funding to serve the gaps when children are not in school. In some areas, we operate mobile or stationary school pantries to meet the needs of food insecure children and their families. However, the largest of our privately-funded efforts is our backpack program which is designed to reach kids during the weekend or summer when they cannot access a feeding site. Backpack programs are operated throughout the country and originated with a school nurse in Arkansas. When children ended up in the nurse's office on Monday mornings complaining of stomachaches and dizziness, she realized that the children had had little to eat since their school lunch on Friday. The school partnered with a local food bank to provide backpacks with child-friendly groceries that children could take home with them to ensure they had enough to eat over the weekend.

The backpack program follows a similar model at Dare to Care Food Bank and across the country. At the end of school on Friday afternoon, children are provided a backpack filled with nutritious foods in child-friendly packaging to ensure they have enough food to eat over the weekend. We pack backpacks and deliver them to schools. Schools in turn distribute the backpacks to children in need of food assistance. Dare to Care Food Bank started the program in 2004 with 4 locations and we now provide backpacks in 38 schools across 11 counties serving nearly 2,100 students in primarily rural communities where afterschool feeding programs are not as readily available. We have focused on our rural communities because we know there are fewer services and supports to meet the needs of these hungry children. Nationally in the Feeding America network in fiscal year 2014, 159 food banks operated backpack programs at over 11,500 sites, serving nearly 44 million meals to 457,000 children. Within the Feeding America network, backpack programs are the largest child nutrition program.

Summer and Afterschool Program Challenges and Barriers

In the more than ten years Dare to Care Food Bank has operated the federal afterschool and summer child nutrition programs, we have learned where and how the afterschool and summer programs work best. We, like food banks around the country, have also faced barriers that prevent us from expanding our program to meet all children who are in need of nutrition assistance. Some of these barriers include insufficient or inconsistent transportation to get children to existing sites, lack of community infrastructure and resources to establish sites, and weather and safety concerns.

In Jefferson County, the school district is an important partner and operates summer and afterschool programs to reach those in need. We therefore work with other partners to provide food to summer camps, church groups, and city recreational centers where low-income children are already congregating.

We often provide prizes or other incentives to encourage children to visit the feeding site. However, in the more suburban and rural areas, there are significant challenges to operating summer feeding sites. Most schools do not operate a summer feeding program and even those who do report low participation rates because children are not able to travel to the site each day to participate.

Often a parent or other adult may not be available to take a child to and from a site. Does a parent feel safe letting their child walk to a local summer feeding site? Are there major roads or unsafe sidewalks that prevent a young child from attending a site that is only a short walk away? How can we support children in areas of high crime or gun violence who are fearful about walking to a park to get a summer meal? In the summer months, weather can also be a concern. Our fellow sponsors across the country often experience extreme heat, thunderstorms, or tornados as barriers to children attending site-based programs. In many communities, our food banks are unable to find a suitable location to host a summer feeding site. Some towns do not have a public library, recreation center, or Boys and Girls Club that is close enough to be utilized by the population in need.

Innovation and Policy Solutions

There are several policy changes Congress could make that would help Dare to Care Food Bank, and thousands of other charities and community-based organizations across the country reach more children during the summer and after school. We need a two part strategy to reach children when they are out of school. First, we need to strengthen the site-based model by streamlining federal programs and making it easier for community providers to expand the number of sites available to children. Second, we need to allow communities to adopt alternate program models to fill the gap in communities where children cannot otherwise access a meal.

Strengthen the Site-Based Model

To strengthen the site-based model and reach more children when they are out of school, we recommend that community providers be able to operate one program year round through SFSP which would reduce red tape and streamline federal programs. To further encourage more sites to participate, the area eligibility requirement used by many sites should be changed to make it easier for sites to operate in communities with concentrations of low-income children.

Dare to Care Food Bank aims to reach children facing hunger – no matter the time of year. That is why we support afterschool programs with nutritious balanced meals and snacks during the school year and serve those same institutions during the summer months. However, as sponsors of these sites, the food bank must work with two separate federal programs – the Child and Adult Care Food Program during the school year and the Summer Food Service Program during the summer, even though we are serving the same 24 sites, and often the same kids.

The two programs – CACFP and SFSP – are similar but have inconsistent program requirements that can cause confusion for staff and volunteers operating the program. What's more, the administrative requirements are often duplicative. Our food bank staff have to apply twice to the state agency – once for afterschool and again in the summer – and also have to conduct training and monitoring, often for the same staff and same sites back-to-back. Our training for the summer food program occurs at the start of summer, and then we turn around and train the same staff again before October for the afterschool program.

Our food bank serves counties in Kentucky and Indiana and therefore we have to work with two different state agencies – and four different contacts – to operate programs year-round. In a handful of states, CACFP and SFSP are administered by different state agencies, further increasing inefficiency and duplication.

Community-based organizations that operate federal nutrition programs that reach kids while they are out of school, like our food bank, and local YMCAs, Boys & Girls clubs, parks and recreation departments, or other charities, should have the ability to operate one program. This will allow them to focus on feeding hungry kids, not pushing paperwork. While schools have the ability to operate after school and summer feeding sites year round through one program, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), community based organizations must operate separate programs. While we know the streamlining of the two programs will assist our food bank to operate the sites more efficiently, we also know it will enable some of our partners who haven't participated in both programs because of the paperwork burden to begin sponsoring and operating sites for children in their community.

Another way to expand the number of sites available to children would be to change the area eligibility criteria to allow more sites in low-income areas to operate. To qualify currently as an open site, a site must meet the area eligibility test – located in an area where at least 50 percent of school children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals (at or below 185 percent of poverty). However, the 50 percent threshold is inconsistent with other federally funded summer programs, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs and Title 1, which require at least 40 percent. Better aligning the eligibility between these federal programs would maintain the program's focus on areas with above average numbers of low-income children while opening up new access points for underserved families.

Allow Alternate Program Models

A second recommendation to reduce the summer meal gap is to permit community organizations, such as the Dare to Care Food Bank, to operate alternative program models to reach kids where they do not otherwise have access to a meal site. No two communities are the same, and therefore our organizations need a variety of tools and program models to effectively reach those in need. This includes proven strategies such as providing flexibility from the requirement that kids consume meals on-site, allowing communities to deliver or send meals home with children, and giving families a summer grocery card to supplement their household food budget. Where the current site-based model is available, it is great for children. These additional federal program models should complement the site-based model to effectively fill the gaps to ensure low-income children have access to the nutrition they need throughout the year. Allowing complementary program models and strong national standards will ensure that whether children live in Kentucky or Indiana, Maine or Mississippi, they will have nutrition programs available throughout the year.

Dare to Care Food Bank, like community-organizations across the country, has sought private funding to try alternative models to reach kids while they are out of school. Our backpack program implemented in the rural communities of our service areas was designed to meet this very need. Some of our sister food banks, such Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee, have implemented mobile summer feeding programs to bring food to children with high need in hard to reach areas. In Tennessee, the food bank purchased four retired school buses, and each day in the summer they travel to communities that don't have traditional summer feeding locations, park the bus, and bring kids on board to eat a nutritious meal. Across the country we have seen the positive impacts of these alternate models – whether a mobile

bus or backpack program. However, they require huge investments from our community. When they are employed using private funds, they are often unsustainable and cannot meet the full need within the community. At our sister food bank in Eastern Michigan, to meet the needs of kids at some of their rural sites where they knew kids were not able to participate every day of the week, the food bank sent kids home with a box of nutritious food for those days they were unable to attend the site. However, the program depends on private funds and the food bank has not been able to operate the program every year and is uncertain about the future sustainability given a lack of consistent funding.

Dare to Care Food Bank would not be able to serve over 77,000 meals each summer without the reimbursements we receive from the Summer Food Service Program. While we have considered alternate models to reach kids in rural areas, without federal reimbursement to offset costs, we cannot implement a sustainable model. A mobile program – bringing food closer to kids rather than requiring them to travel, often more than 10 miles, to participate in a summer feeding site – offers the potential to reach children who are simply not able to access a site. However, our rural communities in need are small and far apart and at this point, we have determined a mobile model is cost prohibitive. The time and costs associated with the travel and the time associated with the requirement that kids eat a full meal before we move on to the next location would limit the number of children and meals we could serve. In most of our rural communities, there is not a summer feeding program – privately funded, or through the Summer Food Service Program – because of private funding constraints and limitations within the federal program. As a result, fewer than 10 percent of the children in Kentucky who are receiving free or reduced price lunch during the school year are accessing summer meals.

Community-based providers need more options in SFSP to meet the unique needs of our communities. While our challenges are mostly related to transportation concerns in rural areas, we know that our colleagues in urban and suburban communities face similar challenges.

We were thankful when Congress appropriated funding to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2009 to test innovative program models for reaching kids during the summer months. Several of the demonstrations tested programs that have shown to be effective through smaller, privately-funded efforts, such as providing kids with backpacks to serve them during the days when they are not able to reach a site. Other program models delivered meals to kids in rural areas where there were no sites that a child could travel to. In these models, implemented in Massachusetts, New York, and Delaware, children received meals close to their homes. By waiving the congregate requirement in hard to reach areas – such as rural communities, where there are no sites available, or where weather or safety challenges impact participation – providers like the Dare to Care Food Bank can utilize all of our resources to reach those in need.

At Dare to Care Food Bank we are excited by another program model that was tested by the USDA to reach hungry kids in the summer: a family grocery card. The EBT Summer Demonstration projects that have been in effect for five consecutive summers provided families with a grocery card pre-loaded with \$60 per month per child certified for free or reduced-price school meals. States administered the program through the EBT systems in either the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the WIC program. The demonstration projects were extensively evaluated and in both rural and urban counties with the results were significant. In households that received funds to purchase groceries during the summer, very low child food security decreased by 33 percent. When compared to non-participants, kids consumed 12.6% more fruits and vegetables, 29.6% more whole grains, 9.7% more dairy, and 7.5% fewer

sugar-sweetened beverages.¹² What's more, 50-98 percent of families in the demonstration area used the benefit, which is significantly larger than the nearly 18 percent of children that utilize the current congregate summer meal program.

While we believe in the importance of private-public partnerships to provide programming and meals to kids in need throughout the year, we know recreating the infrastructure that exists during the school year is not feasible and therefore would like to see the grocery card program expanded and implemented in communities that have high need and are particularly difficult to reach.

Conclusion

Child hunger is a solvable problem in our community. Dare to Care Food Bank and our colleagues and neighbors are dedicated to this fight and will continue to work together – with government and private stakeholders – to support the needs of our children in Kentucky and Indiana. We urge Congress to invest new resources to increase access to child nutrition programs serving children outside of school, supporting the child nutrition programs that help us to do this important work.

By both strengthening the site-based model as well as providing alternate models for communities where the site-based model is not practical, Congress can help ensure children have the nutrition they need throughout the year to thrive. Through reauthorization of child nutrition programs, Congress should allow community providers to operate one child nutrition program year round through SFSP and reduce the area eligibility requirement for sites from 50 to 40 percent. Congress should also allow alternate program models such as allowing children to consume meals off-site or giving families a summer grocery card. We believe that with more program options – when working together in a targeted, complementary way – we can close the summer meal gap. We call on Congress to reauthorize summer and afterschool feeding programs in a way that marries strong national program standards that ensure program integrity, nutrition quality, and food safety, with the flexibility that communities need to reach all children facing hunger.

On behalf of the Dare to Care Food Bank, Feeding America, our partner agencies and the people we serve, I thank you for your time and attention. I encourage you to strengthen child nutrition programs in reauthorization to help us end hunger in this country. And if you have not already, I encourage to visit your local food bank to see first-hand the great work they do. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brian Riendeau
Executive Director
Dare to Care Food Bank

¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Report on the Summer Food for Children Demonstration Projects for Fiscal Year 2013, December 2013.