

Good morning Chairman Langerholc, Minority Chair Dinniman, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak about the Summer Food Service Program. I am Kelsey Gross the Child Nutrition Programs Supervisor for Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. We cover 11 counties in Southwestern PA. We lead program coordination and outreach efforts for the Summer Food Program in our 11-county service area and sponsor the program in Allegheny County. I have been with the Food Bank's Child Nutrition team for nearly seven years; first as an AmeriCorps VISTA, then as an Outreach Coordinator, and now as a Program Supervisor.

First, I will provide a quick overview of the program. The Summer Food Service Program is a national program administered by USDA and the PA Department of Education. It provides free summer meals to kids 18 and under in low-income areas. The thought behind it is that summer should not be a time of hunger for kids who rely on free or reduced school meals for their daily nutritional needs. SFSP steps in to ensure that kids have access to nutritious meals when school is out.

The program works by reimbursing local sponsors, for example, Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank or Greater Johnstown School District in Cambria County, a flat rate for every meal served to an eligible child. Meals are served at program sites such as schools, churches, parks, public housing communities and many other types of community centers. In Pennsylvania, 109,058 kids accessed the program last year, resulting in 12.4 million dollars of federal reimbursement dollars coming to Pennsylvania. In Cambria County, 44,688 meals were served to kids last year.

In Cambria County specifically, we are especially grateful for Cambria County Child Development Corporation (CCCDC) and Greater Johnstown School District, the two largest sponsors in the county. Greater Johnstown School District has been running the program for nearly 30 years and feeds kids not only at school buildings, but in many housing communities, the local library and at several area churches. CCCDC primarily works through partnerships with local libraries, pools and other community organizations who serve the more rural parts of Cambria County. They achieve this partnership by working with the Nutrition Group through local senior centers, who vend the meals to nearby Summer Food Program sites all over the county.

Even though Cambria County has seen a lot of success in recent years, the two sponsors we work with still face major program barriers. As a new sponsor ourselves, we have encountered similar barriers in Allegheny County.

The first, and often the greatest, barrier for sponsors is that sponsors are only reimbursed for meals served, not meals prepared. The majority of sites are "open," which means that any kid 18

and under can come to the site because the census tract or school district where the site is located has mostly low-income kids living there. It is great to be able to serve kids without as much administrative burden or stigmatizing verification and sign-in processes. It also means that attendance fluctuates from day to day, which makes it hard to predict how many meals a site will need on any given day. Extremely hot or rainy weather and other activities happening in the area just add to inconsistencies in the number of meals that are served. As a result, only 83.7 percent of the meals we paid for during the month of July were served to children. Although we have lots of ideas on how to improve this, it is unlikely that it will ever be possible to cover the operating and administrative costs of this program without additional support from grants and other sources.

Even with a conservative policy about serving seconds (leftovers are to be saved when possible except on Fridays) about 5.7 percent of the complete meals we served to children in the month of July were second meals. At the federal level, it would help to increase the percentage of second meals that can be reimbursed to help off-set some of the inevitable financial loss to sponsors. The program already has policies and systems in place to prevent sites from ordering with the intent to serve seconds.

Related to reimbursement for seconds, there is an additional child nutrition program that many SFSP sponsors also operate. The program is called the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and one of the provisions under its umbrella is At Risk afterschool meals. The afterschool meals program runs similarly to the Summer Food program, but seconds are not reimbursable at all. This is a state by state decision, not a federal one. If the PA Department of Education would choose to reimburse seconds, or even a percentage of seconds, it would really benefit sponsors of that program as well. The goal of both programs is to provide eligible kids with a single meal, but sponsors have to order enough meals every day to be able to feed all the kids at a program's busiest day, so some amount of leftovers is unavoidable and these expenses are not insignificant over the course of the year. Allowing reimbursement for seconds would help sponsors reduce some of this loss.

Also related to both CACFP afterschool meals and Summer Meals is the administrative burden for each program. Many sponsors are currently running both programs, like Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank does. Through Child Nutrition Reauthorization, we would like to see sponsors able to enroll in both programs without having to do twice the paperwork. Similarly, we would also like to see the CACFP At-Risk program adopt Summer Food Program eligibility standards. Currently, Summer Food sites can use school district data or census data to qualify for the program but CACFP at-risk sites can only use school district data. By allowing CACFP sites to also use census data to qualify, it would open up the program to be able to serve pockets of poverty within more affluent districts. This would be especially valuable in rural areas with large

school district boundaries. Connecting the two programs would make it much easier for organizations to sponsor both and provide more meals to children in need year-round.

One issue that I know is of particular interest to Chairman Langerholc is meal waste. Individual sponsors have the discretion to decide what their sites should do with leftovers after kids have been served a meal and any seconds, but under the current regulations of the program, kids are not allowed to take full meals off-site. Navigating food safety laws can be difficult since, in Pennsylvania, laws can differ by county or sometimes even by municipality. So, some sponsors tell their sites to throw away any food not consumed by kids that day if they are an outdoor site without refrigeration or to avoid any liability associated with those food safety concerns.

Other sites may store food and serve it the next day, if they have appropriate refrigeration and storage space to keep it safe. As a sponsor, we allow our sites to keep cold leftovers to serve first the next day and encourage the adoption of share tables where kids can put unwanted items for other kids to take. At the Food Bank, we are interested in donating leftover food to local food pantries and soup kitchens, so it does not go to waste. We are evaluating the logistics of maintaining food safety standards and exploring partnerships to help make this happen within the next year, but this will not be possible to organize for all of our sites. Particularly for our park sites, we would really like to send leftover meals home with children, which is allowed under federal guidelines, but is not currently allowed under Pennsylvania regulations.

Another potential possibility to reduce food waste would be to allow hungry parents to also receive a meal at a summer food site when they accompany their child. However, currently, only kids' meals are reimbursable. Some sponsors allow parents to pay a small fee for food or find other sources of funding to cover adult meals, but many sponsors do not have the capacity to figure out the logistics of adult meals.

While most of the issues that I just described can only be fixed at the federal level, there are steps that you can take to help improve issues at the state level.

The first issue is the national waiver rescission that happened last year. Several waivers that helped sponsors better manage the administrative burden of the program were revoked in October 2018. The PA Department of Education had the opportunity to re-apply for these waivers on behalf of all sponsors in the state. Though they did apply for three waivers related to program monitoring requirements, they did not apply for other waivers that would allow sites to have more flexible meal serving times and reduce the amount of paperwork needed to qualify closed enrolled sites.

For the sponsors in our service area, the waiver rescission around mealtime rules was especially cumbersome. In previous years, sites were able to serve meals without any mandatory wait

period in-between them. Without the waiver for this rule, sites that were able to serve two meals in past summers chose to just serve lunch this summer because they did not have the capacity to staff their site for the mandatory three-hour wait period between meal start-times. For example, if a program wanted to serve lunch at noon, breakfast would have to start at 9 a.m. or earlier. Similarly, they would not be able to start serving snacks until 3 p.m. This was particularly difficult for sites entirely run by volunteers with limited time to give and sites with programming, like libraries, that forced them to space their programming in a way that does not work as well for the kids and families if they wanted to offer the food. The mealtime rule resulted in some sites that previously served two meals now choosing to only serve one.

The other waiver rescission that was difficult for sponsors and sites related to program eligibility. In previous years, closed programs that were located in eligible areas were allowed to use area eligibility to qualify for SFSP without having to collect individual eligibility information for their kids. This year, all closed sites had to prove that at least 50 percent of their kids were eligible for free/reduced meals in order for all kids at the site to eat free SFSP meals. With the growing number of charter schools, several of our sites were requesting eligibility information from five or more schools. Also, with more limited information about individual eligibility available to schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) it has been difficult to establish eligibility for closed sites in these areas. We would request your help in asking the PA Department of Education to push for each of these waivers for the upcoming summer so that we can feed more meals to more kids.

Secondly, sponsors across the state could use your support in helping to promote the program. In Pennsylvania, only 16 percent of children that rely on free or reduced school meals are accessing their local Summer Food Program (nationally, it is 17 percent). We ask that you work with the PA Department of Education to make sure that the list of summer meal sites is released earlier so families and students can plan for the summer. Additionally, we ask that you and your colleagues in the General Assembly help us promote the Summer Food program on your social media pages, websites, and newsletters. You can play a major role in helping us reach out to the families living in your district so that they know where to access a meal throughout the summer.

Finally, in addition to providing meals to children through the above-mentioned programs, Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank also works with schools to support them in increasing participation in School Breakfast. We are grateful for the Legislature's inclusion of funds for School Breakfast mini grants in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 budgets. These grants have been important for schools that wanted to implement an alternative model such as Grab and Go breakfast or Breakfast in the Classroom so that more children benefit from this important meal and can be focused on learning during the school day.

Thank you for your time, and again, thanks to Chairman Langerholc for visiting Summer Food sites in his district and inviting us to speak today about the Summer Food Program.