



Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Committees on Children & Youth and Education  
Joint Informational Hearing on the Importance of Childhood Nutrition and School Meals

Thursday, March 30, 2023  
Room 515, Irvis Office Building

Statement of Mr. Shea Saman  
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Dear Chairwoman Bullock, Chairman Schweyer, Representative Jozwiak, Representative Topper, and other members of the Children & Youth and Education committees,

Thank you for the invitation to testify today and for the opportunity to share a perspective on childhood hunger and nutrition. My name is Shea Saman, and I am the Chief Financial Officer at Feeding Pennsylvania. I also currently serve as the interim CEO.

Feeding Pennsylvania is the statewide association of nine Feeding America food banks. Our members include Philabundance, Second Harvest Food Bank of the Lehigh Valley, CEO Weinberg Food Bank, Helping Harvest Food Bank of Berks and Schuylkill, Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, Westmoreland County Food Bank, Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Community Food Warehouse of Mercer County, and Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania. Together, we serve nearly 2 million people in all 67 counties in Pennsylvania, including over 500,000 children.

Our members serve as community hubs and distributors of charitable food. They acquire commodities through various means including wholesale purchases, retail donations, federal programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and state programs like the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) and Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS). Then, they distribute these commodities to neighbors in need through a large, decentralized network of community partners such as church pantries, senior centers, and other community organizations. Annually, the Feeding Pennsylvania network of food banks sources and distributes over 160 million pounds of food to neighbors in need.

The current approach to addressing hunger, and particularly child hunger, is a piecemeal but comprehensive approach. Different programs address different needs.

At food banks, our members support and provide food to youth-specific programs like school pantries and backpack programs, making sure every child, and their family, has access to fresh, nutritious food in the evenings and on weekends. Our food banks also sponsor and help administer federal programs, such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). These

programs provide children with nutritious meals at day cares, during afterschool programs, and in the summertime when schools are closed.

These efforts to ensure children eat when schools are closed are a key part of addressing childhood food insecurity. However, the largest and most comprehensive tools in addressing childhood food insecurity are while students are in school, through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Pre-pandemic, these two programs served more than 30 million meals daily across the country, and that number has only continued to grow due to economic uncertainty and rising inflation. For some children, school meals are the only reliable source of food they have access to.

School nutrition programs are vital tools in reducing child hunger and supporting students' educational achievement. Multiple studies show that the availability of school meals reduces food insecurity among children<sup>1</sup>. Students who face hunger are also more likely to repeat a grade, experience developmental impairments, and have social and behavioral problems<sup>2</sup>. Plus, participation in these programs alleviates pressure on food banks while also freeing up funds for parents to pay for other necessities such as housing, medicine, or gas/vehicle expenses to travel to work.

The role of the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) as critical cornerstones in addressing child food insecurity cannot be understated. Food banks are, and will continue to be, there for neighbors and children in need. However, programs like SBP and NSLP, which serve children in need directly at their schools and in their communities, continue to be some of the most effective tools we have in combatting child hunger in our communities.

Considering the recent rise in demand for food assistance along with the sunset of SNAP Emergency Allotments, food banks and other nutrition programs will be needed more than ever. We thank the General Assembly for their interest in learning more about these important programs and encourage you to continue to support a comprehensive approach when it comes to addressing hunger in our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

<sup>1</sup> Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). Retrieved from: [https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning\\_FNL.pdf](https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning_FNL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Feeding America. Retrieved from: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts>