

Childhood Nutrition & Access to Healthy Foods: A Foundation for Lifelong Success

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Finance February 9, 2017 Public Hearing

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the Senate Finance Committee's filed budget bill for 2018-2019, Senate Bill 1, and in particular Article VI (Natural Resources). **I write to urge you to support increased funding for "Texans Feeding Texans" (Surplus Agricultural Product Grant) to \$10M for Fiscal Year 2018-19 (SB 1, Article VI-7, Rider 10).** This funding supports Texas food banks in their commitment to help needy Texans reach their full potential for a healthy, productive life.

Texans Care for Children is a statewide non-profit, non-partisan, multi-issue children's policy organization that works to drive policy change to improve the lives of Texas children today for a stronger Texas tomorrow. We collaborate with community leaders and local partners around the state to identify challenges facing children and families and develop potential policy solutions to improve the well-being of Texas children and families. Thousands of bills may be filed during this legislative session, but in many ways, the most important one for Texas children is the state budget bill.

Texans Care for Children supports increased funding for Texans Feeding Texans because this program is an effective strategy for combating childhood hunger and improving children's health. One in six Texas households struggle to avoid hunger, despite low unemployment statewide.¹ While kids of all backgrounds live in families that struggle to consistently put food on the table, children of color in Texas are at higher risk of going to bed hungry on any given day: 17 percent of White children, 38 percent of Black children, and 31 percent of Hispanic children live in families that struggle to put food on the table.²

Texans Feeding Texans grants are used by food banks to rescue surplus produce that would otherwise go to waste. Helping families obtain healthy, nutritious foods not only combats hunger, but also helps children establish a good foundation for health and school success. Although hunger is harmful to any person, it can be particularly devastating among children because of its negative effects on a child's health, ability to learn in school, and potential for long-term consequences. Children growing up in food-insecure families are at higher risk of poor health and delayed development from the earliest stages of life.³ In fact, children who are food insecure are more likely to require hospitalization and higher risk of

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chronic conditions like anemia and asthma.⁴ Children who face hunger may be at greater risk of truancy and behavioral problems, including fighting, anxiety, bullying, hyperactivity, and aggression.⁵

The state of Texas has partnered with Feeding Texas for 15 years to implement the Texans Feeding Texans grant program. These grant funds help Feeding Texas food banks obtain surplus produce that would otherwise go to waste. Funds go directly to farmers to offset their harvesting and packaging costs, and cover the cost of transportation of produce to food banks.

Notably, Feeding Texas food banks combine this fresh produce with proven nutrition and health interventions, helping the low-income families they serve to change their diets. They call this combined approach "Feeding with Impact." Significant research shows that providing nutritious food to people who are learning to change their diets compounds the impact of these learnings, leading to long-lasting behavioral changes and improved health for families.

Feeding Texas is already measuring the success of their strategy through changes in client blood sugar, weight, shopping and consumption. This approach, if properly funded, will yield better health and reduced costs of care for low-income Texans. **Economic research by Dr. Ray Perryman shows that every \$1 invested in food banks returns \$3.27 to the state in reduced health care costs and increased workplace productivity.**

The key to scaling these outcomes is more fresh produce. Feeding Texas estimates that 350 million pounds of surplus produce are made available each year. With \$10M for FY 2018-19, Texas food banks estimate they could double the amount of produce they currently are able to rescue. **This leads to more fresh produce for Texas kids and families and a brighter, healthier Texas future.**

Thank you for your leadership and your support for fighting hunger and improving the health of children and families in Texas. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

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¹ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew Rabbitt, Christian Gregory, and Anita Singh, Household Food Security in the United States in 2015. USDA (Sept. 2016). Available at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=79760>.

² State of Texas Children 2016: Race and Equity." Center for Public Policy Priorities, Page 20, http://forabettertexas.org/images/KC_2016_SOTCReport_web.pdf.

³ Zaslow, Bronte-Tinkew, Capps, Horowitz, Moore, and Weinstein (2008) Food Security During Infancy: Implications for Attachment and Mental Proficiency in Toddlerhood. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 13 (1), 66-80.

⁴ Cook, Frank, Leveson, Neault, Heeren, Black, Berkowitz, Casey, Meyers, Cutts, and Chilton (2006) Child food insecurity increases risks posed by household food insecurity to young children's health. *Journal of Nutrition*, 136, 1073-1076. Kirkpatrick, McIntyre, and Potestio (2010) Child hunger and long-term adverse consequences for health. *Archive of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 164 (8), 754-762. Eicher-Miller, Mason, Weaver, McCabe, and Boushey (2009) Food Insecurity is associated with iron deficiency anemia in US adolescents. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 90, 1358-1371. Skalicky, Meyers, Adams, Yang, Cook, and Frank (2006) Child Food Insecurity and Iron Deficiency Anemia in Low-Income Infants and Toddlers in the United States. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 10 (2), 177-185.

⁵ Murphy, Wehler, Pagano, Little, Kleinman and Jellinek (1998) Relationship Between Hunger and Psychosocial Functioning in Low-Income American Children. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37 (2), 163-170. Slack and Yoo (2005) Food hardship and child behavior problems among low-income children. *Social Service Review*, 75, 511-536. Whitaker, Phillips, and Orzol (2006) Food insecurity and the risks of depression and anxiety in mothers and behavior problems in their pre-school-aged children. *Pediatrics*, 118, e859-e868. Slopen, N., Fitzmaurice, G., Williams, D.R., & Gilman, S.E. (2010). Poverty, food insecurity, and the behavior of childhood internalizing and externalizing disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49,444-452.