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**Before the House Education and Workforce Committee
“Serving Students and Families Through Child Nutrition Programs”
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Good morning. Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Committee, thank you for holding this important hearing and for inviting me to testify today; it is an honor. Ending hunger in America is my vocation, and I have spent more than 20 years working in every sector and at all levels - local, state, national - in community organizations, state and federal government, research firms, technology consulting, and now at Share Our Strength, a national not-for-profit organization that has been on the front lines of the war against poverty and hunger for over 30 years. We invest in and implement data-driven programs in all 50 states and conduct research to find and replicate sustainable solutions.

Our No Kid Hungry campaign seeks to end childhood hunger in America by breaking down the barriers between programs like school breakfast and summer meals and the kids they are meant to serve. We create public-private partnerships, working with states and Governors on both sides of the aisle to make the federal programs run more efficiently and effectively. At the same time, we work to empower low-income families to maximize their food resources.

Why is this work so important? Because 16 million American children struggle with hunger.

Hunger might not be as visible in America as it is in some other parts of the world, but it can be found everywhere in our nation, and we have a responsibility to solve this problem.

Hunger affects one in five children.¹

Hunger is in your Congressional district.

Hunger is prevalent in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Hunger is in our schools. For the first time in half a century, the majority of U.S. children in public schools come from low-income families,² and we know from our survey of teachers that they see the face of hunger each day and understand the profound connections between hunger, behavior, and learning. Educators spend an average of \$420 of their own money each year to feed their students³.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Food Security Status of U.S. Households in 2013,” 2013

² Southern Education Foundation, “[A New Majority: Low-Income Students Now a Majority in Nation’s Public Schools](#),” 2015

³ Share Our Strength and Salter Mitchell, “[Hunger in Our Schools](#),” 2015

Despite their best efforts, charity and food banks simply can't keep up with the growing demand for food assistance.⁴ That's where there federal nutrition programs come in. They are designed to meet the need at the scale it exists, and they're doing so successfully. To put this in context: all of the food provided by U.S. charities in 2010 only amounted to about six percent of the food distributed by federal food programs that year.⁵ Through our on-the-ground experience in states across the country, we work directly with community organizations, churches, and nonprofits who are working tirelessly to help meet the needs of their communities. They tell us day in and day out that without the federal nutrition programs as the backbone to their work, they would be forced to turn children away to go hungry.

Over the summer – when school meals are no longer available -- children are particularly vulnerable to hunger. Their parents and caregivers struggle to fill the nutrition gap. In our survey of low-income households, over four in ten report sometimes not having enough food to feed their families during summer months.⁶ This financial struggle also leads to difficult tradeoffs. Feeding America reports that, over the course of a year, sixty-nine percent of households they serve have to choose between food and utilities. Sixty-seven percent choose between food and transportation, which can affect their ability to get to work.⁷ That's why an effective summer feeding program authorized by Child Nutrition Reauthorization is so vital.

When we aren't able to give our children the nutrition they need, we fail them. Not only are they less able to concentrate at school, they're also more vulnerable to toxic stress and health problems like obesity and diabetes. These are expensive problems that can follow children into adulthood, exacerbating our nation's health care burden. When they grow up, they may fall into the estimated three out of four young Americans who cannot qualify for military service, according to "Mission: Readiness," an organization of senior retired military leaders. The idea of feeding our children through organized federal programs is rooted in military readiness.⁸ When the school lunch program was established by Congress in 1946, it was a reaction to military recruits being turned away due to poor nutrition. The child nutrition programs authorized in this bill still play that same vital role in preparing our children for the military and for success in any important career.

But there's good news: childhood hunger in America is a solvable problem, and, thanks to the ongoing support of Congress, the child nutrition programs are a strong and a central part of the solution. For decades, public-private partnerships have been at the core of this solution, allowing community organizations, schools, faith-based groups, and private companies to come together to address the issue. Through our work to end childhood hunger in all 50 states, we see the power that comes from all sectors working together to solve this problem. Without creating any new government programs, the No Kid Hungry public-private collaborations around the country have connected kids to over 107 million more meals.

Feeding our hungry children is not the sole responsibility of government, or of charity, or of struggling families – we have a shared responsibility. By all of us working together, we can more efficiently leverage existing resources to meet the needs of our children.

When kids participate, these programs help them learn, become healthier, and grow into stronger adults.

⁴ Bread for the World. "Churches and Hunger." 2014.

⁵ Bread for the World, "Fact Sheet: Creating a Circle of Protection to Protect the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." 2013

⁶ Share Our Strength and APCO Insight, "[National Survey of Low-Income Parents.](#)" 2013

⁷ Feeding America, "Hunger in America 2014," 2014

⁸ Hawley, Richard E. *Written Testimony for U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture Hearing, on Behalf of Mission Readiness.* June 12, 2014.

For example, the school breakfast program has a clear effect on academic achievement. A social impact analysis conducted by Deloitte shows that, on average, students who eat school breakfast score seventeen and a half percent higher on math tests and attend one and a half more days of school each year. Together, this makes them twenty percent more likely to graduate from high school and earn an average of \$10,000 more each year.⁹

Additionally, the Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has consistently demonstrated strong positive health outcomes for mothers, babies, and young children. Participation in WIC leads to better pregnancy outcomes, including fewer infant deaths and increased birth weights. WIC also has a positive impact on children's diet, including reducing the risk of obesity.¹⁰

However, while these programs work for the kids who can participate, too many eligible children can't participate because of bureaucratic barriers, too much administrative burden, and for the summer months, a program that has not been updated in 40 years and serves fewer than one in seven children in need.

Fortunately, we have proven strategies to modernize these programs. Through Child Nutrition Reauthorization, Congress has an opportunity to make practical policy changes to reform the summer meals program and make the other child nutrition programs more efficient.

In America, we are blessed to have an abundance of food, programs that provide healthy food to children in need, and a strong, shared commitment to end childhood hunger that crosses generations, cultures, and political parties. We know it is unacceptable for any child to go hungry in America. Thank you for your support of this important legislation so that we can continue to have strong, sustainable programs that help struggling families feed their kids *and* get to work. It's critical, however, that we update these programs to remove bureaucratic barriers and create efficiencies that will allow us to reach those kids who currently go without.

Let's let kids be kids and make America strong.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I look forward to your questions.

⁹ Deloitte and Share Our Strength. "Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis." 2013.

¹⁰ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. "About WIC." 2013.