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**Opening Statement of Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN) Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary  
Education Hearing on “Examining the Summer Food Service  
Program.”**

Good morning, and welcome to today’s subcommittee hearing. I would like to thank members of the subcommittee and our witnesses for joining us today to examine the USDA’s Summer Food Service Program and discuss how we can responsibly ensure that the most disadvantaged children have access to nutritious meals during the summer months.

Last Congress, we considered legislation to reform this program by reinvesting funds from other child nutrition programs that were in many cases benefiting middle-class families earning multiples above the poverty line to the Summer Food Service Program. I hope this hearing will bring valuable insight that will help us continue our work.

In America today, nearly 1 in 4 children live in households below the poverty line. Of these kids, over one million are classified as food insecure, meaning their parents cannot or do not provide consistent access to enough nutritious food for the child to be healthy. As a result, during the school year, many kids over-rely on the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) for their nutritional needs. But during the summer months, the routine of the school day is gone and they are vulnerable to hunger. That is where the Summer Food Service Program comes into play.

The summer program provides meals to children from qualified households during the summer months. In 2017, the program served over 152 million meals to over 2 million children. Like many government-created programs, it has its challenges.

Our proposed reforms last Congress included increasing flexibility for states and providers, ensuring that taxpayer dollars truly benefit the most vulnerable of children, and examining new ways to encourage business participation to help drive down cost. The Committee also asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine participation trends and identify weaknesses within the program.

Today, we will hear what the GAO found, and also hear from the Inspector General on a report they conducted. They will highlight important findings regarding problems facing the USDA and the organizations that participate in the program.

These reports present an opportunity to examine the program as a whole and identify changes. I believe that our focus should be on helping those who truly need this program and in a temporary manner, and not handing out free meals to those whose families who otherwise have or should have the resources to do so.

Finally, I know that this program is very important to a number of members on this Committee. As the Committee continues its work on improving the Summer Food Service Program, we should do so with one thing in mind, how to care for the kids who need this program the most by focusing on investing our limited resources into the program effectively. While doing so, it is incumbent upon this Committee to identify other places where our resources are not as well spent, and use those resources to fund some of the top priorities for Members, like the Summer Food Service Program.

Today's witnesses are well-suited to provide us with their invaluable insight into the summer program, and I look forward to hearing from them as well as from other members of the subcommittee as we dive deeper into the Summer Food Service Program.

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