

# SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK of Northeast Tennessee



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## **National Commission on Hunger Feeding America Key Policy Recommendations**

**RE: Policy changes to improve the impact federal programs have on hunger.**

**Ms. Andrea Anater at RTI**

Dear Ms. Anater,

Second Harvest's overall comprehensive strategy for the Northeast Tennessee region is to strengthen its outreach to chronically hungry children whose only access to food is through their schools. Our belief that no child should be allowed to go hungry because they don't have access to food. We don't regard feeding hungry children as our mission; it's our responsibility. Sadly, children's programs are the areas where the Food Bank has experienced the most growth.

The need for a summer feeding program is great! In Second Harvest's 8-county area of service, almost 1 out of every 5 individuals (96,772) lives at or below the poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the Map the Meal Gap 2013, 15.9% of Second Harvest's service area (80,440 individuals) is food insecure; 1 out of every 4 children age 18 and under (28,460) is food insecure. Since 2007, the Food Bank has seen a 56% increase in the number of households seeking supplemental food assistance.

There are pockets of low-income neighborhoods surrounding rural county schools with high rates of economically disadvantaged students. With no potential community partners to support summer feeding programs in these areas, Second Harvest strives to reach children in need of food in these neighborhoods.

To address this challenge, Second Harvest developed a method of taking summer meals to these children. In 2012, with grant funding provided by the ConAgra Foods Foundation and Share Our Strength, Second Harvest acquired four retired school buses which functioned as mobile cafeterias. Second Harvest's Lunch Express Summer Food Service Program is an innovative solution for meeting the needs of chronically hungry children in rural areas who lack transportation to traditional summer feeding sites in Northeast Tennessee. These Lunch Express buses transport already prepared lunches into poverty-stricken areas that have very high rates of economically disadvantaged children. Once parked, the children and

teens in these communities board the buses to eat a nutritious meal. The Lunch Express Buses visits low-income neighborhoods and mobile home parks located in areas not currently served by other summer feeding programs. The Lunch Express buses make 9-10 strategic daily stops each between 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. each weekday. Second Harvest also sponsors stationary feeding sites at locations such as Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, Girls Inc. and so forth. As a sponsor of the USDA Summer Food Service Program, Second Harvest must ensure that each child served by the program consume their meals on site. This multi-intervention summer feeding program is still not enabling Second Harvest to reach all the children in need of summer meals due to the fact that the bus needs to stay parked at each location in order for the children to eat their meals while being supervised by program staff.

Since a significant number of children in need of this program live in very low-income, isolated areas, they, quite frankly, are stuck in the hollows and back country with no transportation to programs and support. In most of these rural communities, there is no central gathering places available to serve as a congregate feeding site (such as a pavilion, picnic tables, or even a shady spot under a tree). Additionally, summer brings a continual threat of thunderstorms, and pop-up tents are not substantial enough shelter under such weather conditions.

Sadly, Second Harvest is just scratching the surface of combating summer food insecurity for the children in this 8-county region. In order to reach every child, we would need more buses and workers. Unfortunately, funding is just not available to expand and sustain this growing program at its current model using old buses with poor fuel efficiency. We ask consideration be given for a congregate meal waiver to change the USDA congregate feeding requirement in rural communities. With change our SFSP staff could deliver sack lunches with small more fuel efficient vehicles and cover more areas, thus feeding many more children in need of food assistance. I understand to implement the SFSP in this manner, Congress must change this requirement and would appreciate anything you might be able to do to help. Please feel free to give me a call to discuss.

Best,



Rhonda Chafin

Executive Director

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee