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Illinois Ranks 31st in the Nation in Summer Meals Participation, Report Finds More Children at Risk of Summer Hunger

Chicago, IL— Fewer Illinois children were getting the nutrients they needed during the summer in 2017 compared to 2016, according to findings by the Food Research and Action Center’s report studying participation in the federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). [*Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*](#), released by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), ranks Illinois 31st out of 50 states and the District of Columbia for participation in the federally funded Summer Nutrition Programs, which include the SFSP and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

The Summer Nutrition Programs (SFSP and NSLP during the summer) are federally funded programs through the United States Department of Agriculture and administered in Illinois by the Illinois State Board of Education. The Illinois Hunger Coalition (IHC) runs the statewide, toll-free Hunger Hotline (1-800-359-2163), a bilingual service which, in addition to providing information and case management for all federal nutrition and medical programs, connects families to sites in their community and helps troubleshoot when issues arise at those sites. In 2017, the Hunger Hotline received over 1,200 calls related to summer meals.

In July 2017, 89,065 children participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs in Illinois on an average weekday, meaning that 11.6 low-income children participated in the summer meals program per every 100 participating in the NSLP during the 2016-2017 school year. This represents a decrease of 2,439 Illinois children, or 2.7%, that received summer meals compared to the previous summer. Nationally, these programs served

summer lunch to 3 million children across the country, 14,000 fewer than in July 2016, compared to the 20.1 million who participated in the NSLP during the 2016-2017 school year. Illinois is noted in the report as having weak participation in *both* summer breakfast and lunch.

“The Summer Food Service Program is one of the most important federal child nutrition programs,” said Diane Doherty, Executive Director of the Illinois Hunger Coalition. “It ensures that low-income children throughout the state have quality, nutritious meals while also providing them enrichment activities and safe spaces to go during the summer.”

Free summer meals are provided throughout Illinois at local sites such as schools, recreation centers, libraries, churches, and parks for children ages 18 and under. Not only do summer meals help children stave off hunger, the programming offered at many sites keeps children engaged in educational, physical, and recreational activities. This ensures they return to school better prepared to learn rather than losing crucial academic skills and knowledge over the summer. The IHC supports and advocates for enrichment activities at SFSP sites and has connected sites to grant funding for such activities in the past.

The IHC does outreach working to increase the SFSP presence statewide, primarily in rural counties where transportation is more limited. More large-scale sponsors in rural and southern Illinois could provide much needed access to low-income children struggling with hunger in those areas. In 2017, the IHC connected 92 potential sites to sponsors via outreach and the Hunger Hotline. Currently, 40 out of the 102 Illinois counties have no open (meaning open to all children/no registration required) SFSP sites, and in 2017 the IHC Hunger Hotline received calls from 10 Illinois counties that did not have any open sites. Though Illinois saw an increase by 19.6% in SFSP sites in 2017, there was a 5.5% decrease in SFSP sponsors, who provide food and administrative support to sites. If an agency, park, or organization is interested in becoming a site or a sponsor, they can contact the IHC via the Hunger Hotline for assistance and information about the program.

If Illinois had met FRAC’s goal of reaching 40 children through the Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 receiving free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2016–2017 regular school year, an additional 218,092 children would have been fed each day in July, and Illinois would have collected an additional more than \$16.4 million in child nutrition funding in July alone (assuming the programs operated 20 days).



The Illinois Hunger Coalition will be holding a press conference with anti-hunger advocates, food service providers, and elected officials discussing the findings of the report and the 2018 status of the SFSP in Illinois, as well as celebrating the work of a local SFSP site in Niles, Illinois.

IHC Summer Meals Press Conference
Tuesday, June 19th, 2018 1:00PM (CT)

Niles-Maine District Public Library
6960 Oakton Street, Niles, IL 60714
(847) 663-6627

About [Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report](#): FRAC's report measures participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2017, both in absolute numbers and by comparing the number of children receiving summer meals to the number of low-income children receiving school lunch during the regular school year. The regular school year is used as a benchmark because such a high proportion of low-income children eat school lunch on regular school days.

About [Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report](#): FRAC's report measures the reach of breakfast through the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2017, nationally and in each state, and is a companion piece to FRAC's *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*, which focuses on summer lunch participation.

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The Illinois Hunger Coalition (IHC), founded in 1988, is celebrating 30 years of anti-hunger advocacy. The IHC seeks to #endhungernow by ending hunger's underlying causes through community organizing, advocating for progressive policy, and public education. The IHC's Hunger Hotline is the only statewide toll-free hunger hotline and connects families to summer meal sites throughout the state.