

Opening Remarks for Ranking Member Jared Polis (CO-02)*“Examining the Summer Food Service Program”*

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Hearing

2174 Rayburn House Office Building

July 17, 2018 at 10 a.m.

Thank you Chairman Rokita for holding this important hearing on the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and thank you to the witnesses for testifying before this Committee. SFSP has historically had strong bipartisan support, and I know each Member here has a success story from their district. Sites that distribute meals through SFSP are critical to the health and well-being of America’s children, since many children are not able to access nutritious meals during the day when school is out for the summer. In fact, in July 2016 alone, summer meals sites distributed 2.8 million meals to children in each day. That year, 150 million summer meals were served.

Not only do these sites distribute nutritious food to low-income children, but they also provide educational, enrichment, or recreational activities that keep children engaged, safe, and active members of the community. In Colorado, the Food Bank for Larimer County provides hundreds of meals for kids every day, meeting them in their neighborhoods and at summer camps to make sure they have the nutritious food they need, even in the summer months. Statewide, nearly 1.5 million meals were served through SFSP last summer in Colorado. That’s more than double the number of meals served just eight years ago. Meals were served throughout all parts of the state across 635 feeding sites.

Our bipartisan support, however, shouldn’t promote the status quo. There are always ways that we should work together to improve the program by enhancing child hunger prevention efforts during the summer. A first step – and an important element of this hearing – is to hear about all the efforts that are working on the ground and the importance of protecting this vital program.

I’m excited that Ms. Adele LaTourette, Director of the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition, is here to testify today to speak more about the benefits of SFSP. As a working mother, I know that she sent her child to summer camp. Summer meals sites operate in a similar fashion, allowing working parents to know their children are in safe environments and receiving healthy food while they’re at work. In this sense, SFSP is not only a feeding program, but also a program that can empower working moms like Adele to keep working and have the confidence that their children are in a safe place.

Our bipartisan support for programs that prevent childhood hunger and support working families should not be limited to the summer. Unfortunately, Congressional Republicans are currently engaged in a months-long effort to cut access to critical nutritional assistance programs for needy families. Just a few weeks ago, House Republicans passed a Farm Bill that threatens access to school lunches for 265,000 low-income children. What’s the point of supporting meals in the summer, but taking away meals in the fall, winter, and spring?

I hope my Republican colleagues will reconsider their support for a Farm Bill that starves families struggling with hunger, and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses the benefits of summer

meals and how Congress can work to assist hungry children by protecting and improving the Summer Food Service Program.

I yield back my time.