



**Written Testimony  
of**

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on

**“Past, Present, and Future of SNAP: Developing and Using Evidence-Based Solutions”**

before the

**Subcommittee on Nutrition**

**House Agriculture Committee**

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Thank you, Chairwoman Walorski, Ranking Member McGovern, and members of the Subcommittee on Nutrition for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Jeremy Everett. I am the Director of the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) at Baylor University. THI is a collaborative, capacity-building project that develops and implements strategies to end hunger through research, policy, and community engagement. Headquartered at Baylor University with 12 regional offices across the state, THI convenes federal, state and local government stakeholders with nonprofits, faith communities and business leaders to create an efficient system of accountability that increases food security in Texas. This evidence-based, collaborative model is called *informed engagement*.

*Informed engagement* is one of Baylor University's aspirational statements that comprise a new ten-year vision called Pro Futuris. Under the banner of *informed engagement*, the university aims to address problems facing the local and global community by leading initiatives to form stronger community partnerships and "support research that provides a foundation for effective solutions" (Baylor University, 2015). *Informed engagement* is a cyclical process of research informing on-the-ground strategy and, subsequently, on-the-ground strategy informing research. This process leads to evidence-based solutions that have the potential to make federal nutrition programs more efficient for the state and more impactful for low-income Americans.

Our work within local communities across the state is guided by the following core assumptions: *first*, hunger and poverty are too complex for sectors to address independently of one another; *second*, public and private partnerships are an effective means for coordinating access to SNAP and other federal nutrition programs within a larger continuum of care; *third*, *research and evaluation* provide a foundation for practical evidence-based solutions.

**Assumption One: hunger and poverty are too complex for sectors to address independently of one another.**

It is estimated that 27 percent of children live in food-insecure households in Texas, which is higher than the national average (21%) (Feeding America, 2014). This means they had difficulty meeting basic food needs at least some time during the year (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014). When the Texas Hunger Initiative began in 2009, we identified thousands of organizations tirelessly working to address food security in Texas; however, there were still over 5 million Texans living in food-insecure households. A big reason for this was that many agencies, churches, and food pantries were trying to address the problem on their own. They weren't coordinating with each other. We realized that our first priority needed to be building public and private partnerships.

**Assumption Two: public and private partnerships are an effective means for coordinating access to SNAP and other federal nutrition programs within a larger continuum of care.**

In congruence with Baylor's aspiration of *informed engagement*, THI and its partners across the State of Texas are fostering public and private partnerships to maximize the efficiency of nutrition programs *and* to develop local solutions to address hunger. Public-private partnerships:

- are collaborations among state agencies and local organizations;
- bridge local, state, and federal resources to maximize the efficiency of these programs;
- can be arranged at both the state and local levels, and can operate as formal or informal collaborations.

- decrease access barriers, build local and state networks, and increase community ownership.

More specifically, our public-private partnerships increase access to federal programs including SNAP and child nutrition programs, such as the Summer Meals and Afterschool Meals programs. My colleague Dustin Kunz testified before the full committee on April 15 about our partnership with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and a network of over 1,200 community-based organizations to increase statewide access to benefits such as SNAP. This partnership decreases the need for government offices across the state while ensuring that eligible individuals and families have access to a continuum of care where SNAP is one, crucial part of the solution.

**Assumption Three: *research and evaluation* provide a foundation for practical evidence-based solutions.**

As part of the informed engagement process, our work building public-private partnerships is continuously evaluated. Being at a university, we are in a unique position to engage in research and evaluation that is both collaborative and actionable. Every project we engage in is informed by existing research on food security and evaluated by our research team. Because community-based initiatives “are innovative and are often in a state of continuous development,” we utilize aspects of developmental evaluation (Gamble, 2008, p.12). Our evaluation “focuses on the relationships between people and organizations over time, and the problems or solutions that arise from those relationships” (Kania & Kramer 2013). Our goal is to make sure our programmatic decisions are informed by research and evaluation and our research and evaluation is informed by what we’re doing programmatically.

For example, we've conducted focus groups to understand the experience of families as they access assistance, and we used the information gathered to inform how we support local organizations. We've surveyed local organizations to understand their capacity to serve as access points for nutrition programs and used the results to try to determine what types of organizations might best fill this role. We've also developed maps that show high-poverty census tracts that do not have sufficient access points for nutrition programs to make sure that we are investing in communities with the highest need. And we've written case studies that document the process of building coalitions and use the experiences we've gathered to inform how we build coalitions and public and private partnerships moving forward.

By investing in the capacity of local organizations, they are better equipped to build social capital and networks for low-income families. When public and private partnerships are carefully informed by research and evaluation, stronger networks are likely formed between clients and local organizations, thus building a foundation for increased social capital for low-income families. A study demonstrates that “social capital – a measure of trust, reciprocity and social networks – is positively associated with household food security, independent of household-level socioeconomic factors” (Martin, et al., p.2645). The authors posit that social capital is a complement to anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs because it “strengthens the assets and resources that exist within disadvantaged communities.” Stronger networks, social capital, and federal nutrition programs are important components for building food security.

*Our efforts at the Texas Hunger Initiative demonstrate informed engagement and are building a foundation for evidence-based solutions.* We believe allocating resources to the Hunger Free Communities line item in the Farm Bill will expand the capacity of informed

engagement and public and private partnerships, resulting in greater local coordination and strengthened social networks for low-income Americans. When public and private partnerships are carefully informed by research and evaluation, stronger networks are likely formed between clients and local organizations, thus building a foundation for increased social capital for low-income families. And we believe this has the potential to reduce the need for long-term federal assistance. When we invest in these efforts and build them upon scalable, evidence-based solutions, we exhibit both the will-power *and* the know-how to build public and private infrastructure to strengthen families and communities.

## References

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## **About the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University**

### **Who We Are**

The Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) is a collaborative, capacity-building project focused on ensuring that develops and implements strategies to end hunger through research, policy, and community engagement. Headquartered at Baylor University with 12 regional offices across the state, THI convenes federal, state and local government stakeholders with nonprofits, faith communities and business leaders to create an efficient system of accountability that increases food security in Texas.

### **What We Do**

#### **Developing Public-Private Partnerships**

In the context of THI's work, public-private partnerships (PPPs) are collaborations between state agencies and community-based organizations that maximize nutrition program access by increasing scalability and local community empowerment. PPPs bridge local, state, and federal resources to maximize the efficiency and reach of these programs. PPPs can be arranged at both the state and local levels, and can operate as formal or informal collaborations.

#### **Increasing Access to Nutrition Programs**

THI increases access to nutrition programs by partnering with schools and their districts, nonprofits, and congregations to maximize efficiency and reach of service delivery.

### **CHILD HUNGER OUTREACH**

#### **Summer Meals**

*Since summer 2009*

- 200+ more Summer Meals sponsors were added
- 1,300+ more Summer Meal sites were added
- 48,000+ more kids per day receive Summer Meals
- 5 million more Summer Meals served<sup>4</sup>

#### **School Breakfast**

*Since 2009-2009 school year*

- 65 million more school breakfasts served
- 337,000 more kids per day eat school breakfast<sup>5</sup>

### **FOOD PLANNING ASSOCIATIONS**

Food Planning Associations (FPAs) are collaborations of organizations and individuals who are committed to making their communities food secure through strategic planning and program coordination. FPAs are comprised of individuals representing a variety of sectors including nonprofit, business, health, schools, government, and more.

- THI supports 12 FPAs across the state.

## COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAM

THI and its subcontractors are partnering with Texas Health and Human Services Commission to recruit a network of community-based organizations to assist eligible Texans in utilizing public benefits through an online application system.

- Total Community Partners: 1,200+
- Community Partners represent the following sectors:
  - Health & Disability: 395
  - Early Childhood Intervention & Afterschool Enrichment: 264
  - Protective & Rehabilitative: 61
  - Employment & Skill Training: 51
  - Education: 40
  - Family Services: 17
  - Community Development: 12
  - Government: 9
  - Community Center: 7
  - Other: 281<sup>6</sup>

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4. Texas Hunger Initiative analysis of Texas Department of Agriculture 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 SSO & SFSP Program Data
5. Texas Hunger Initiative analysis of Texas Department of Agriculture 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 NSLP & SBP Program Data
6. Texas Hunger Initiative analysis of Salesforce data.