

HJR 8: Childhood Hunger

Draft Study Plan

Prepared for the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee
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INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Legislature decided to study issues related to childhood hunger in Montana, with passage of House Joint Resolution 8. Legislators ranked the study sixth out of 16 study resolutions in the post-session poll of interim studies. The Legislative Council in May 2011 assigned the study to the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee.

HJR 8 directs the interim committee to:

- study the degree to which Montana children lack access to adequate nutritious food; and
- make recommendations on ways to alleviate childhood hunger and improve access to nutritious foods for children throughout Montana.

HUNGER IN MONTANA

With many Montanans struggling during the recent recession, programs designed to make sure that people have enough to eat have been in high demand. Statistics for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps, provide just one example of the need in Montana. In May 2008, there were 80,911 individuals participating in the program. By May 2009, that number had increased to 96,044, and it stood at 116,368 in May 2010. Most recently, there were 125,957 Montanans participating in SNAP in May 2011 — a nearly 56% increase from May 2008 and an 8% increase from the same time last year.

Likewise, community programs that serve the hungry have indicated an increase in demand for their services. The Montana Food Bank Network reported a 45% increase in the number of children's visits for emergency food when looking at the same six-month periods in 2009 and 2010. The Network recorded 165,443 children's visits during six months in 2010, compared with 113,768 visits in 2009.

People living at, below, or slightly above the poverty line often must decide how to allocate their income among competing needs for housing, gas, utilities, clothing, and food. A 2010 report by the Food Security Council of the Montana Food Bank Network shows that people sometimes pay for other necessary other items before they buy food. Forty-one percent of food pantry clients interviewed for the report said they had skipped meals because their household did not have enough food. More than half the households in the study had children at home. In recent years, Montana has consistently ranked near or above the national average poverty

rate. In June 2010, Montana State University teamed up with the Department of Public Health and Human Services Services (DPHHS) to release *Montana's Poverty Report Card*. The report noted that Montana's estimated poverty rate was 14.1% in 2008, meaning that percentage of Montanans lived below the federal poverty line of \$21,200 for a family of four. The national average poverty rate at the time was 13.2%. In addition, the *Report Card* noted that the percentage of Montanans with incomes below 125%, 150%, and 200% of poverty was higher in Montana than nationally.

While a number of programs and resources exist to assist low-income Montanans, studies and reports show that not all eligible people use the programs — including those programs designed to meet the food needs of Montana families.

STUDY TASKS

As part of HJR 8's overall charge to study the degree to which Montana children lack access to adequate nutritious food, the study resolution suggested that the committee examine:

- existing state, federal, local, and private programs that seek to reduce childhood hunger and improve children's access to nutritious foods, including but not limited to programs based in child-care facilities and schools;
- ways to close the gaps that exist in the services offered by existing programs and reduce the barriers that exist to providing services to children throughout the state;
- ways in which communities and community organizations, including faith-based groups, could work together to:
 - identify gaps in services;
 - create a central clearinghouse for program information;
 - share their expertise in areas such as nutrition education for children, growing one's own food, and basic food preparation skills; and
 - expand successful programs into new communities;
- ways to encourage the use of Montana farm products in schools and other facilities and programs in which children are the primary users;
- policy changes needed at the state or federal level to increase participation in and improve on existing programs, including a review of existing tax policies and changes to those policies that may alleviate childhood hunger;
- the strategic use of public funds in order to produce efficiencies and create a strong case for public and private investments, including ways that the state, communities, and faith-based groups could most efficiently raise awareness about childhood hunger through coordinated communications campaigns that target specific audiences, identify

specific needs, and promote concrete solutions; and

- ways to measure the progress that existing or proposed efforts are making toward the goal of ending childhood hunger.

STUDY RESOURCES

Numerous resources exist to assist Committee members with the HJR 8 study. They include state agencies, particularly DPHHS and the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). DPHHS operates a number of programs for low-income Montanans, including SNAP. OPI oversees the federal programs that provide free or reduced breakfasts and lunches to eligible children. OPI also works with local schools on hunger-related issues. In addition, school districts have started taking innovative approaches to providing children with access to healthy foods when they're not in school. The Farm to School program operates in Montana through a number of participants that are involved in providing Montana-grown food to schools around the state. Tribal governments, as well, have been undertaking efforts to reduce hunger on the state's Indian reservations. And food banks across the state work on a daily basis to provide food to those who are going without.

In addition, the National Conference of State Legislatures monitors federal legislation that affects the SNAP program, as well as the School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. NCSL will serve as a resource in making the committee aware of changes that could impact its study and recommendations.

Staff will review existing programs and any past studies on this topic and also seek the expertise of individuals involved in hunger-reduction efforts across the state. Based on research conducted during the early part of the study period, staff will prepare briefing papers for the Committee and arrange presentations on the study topics.

OUTLINE OF STUDY ACTIVITIES

The study will include the following basic activities during the time periods noted:

1. **Compile background information: June 2011-January 2012.** This stage includes several steps designed to provide the Committee with information about childhood hunger and existing efforts related to the topic, including:
 - a. staff briefing papers summarizing published materials on hunger at the national and state levels, reviewing state and federal assistance programs, surveying private and local efforts to alleviate childhood hunger, and reviewing efforts undertaken in other states.
 - b. presentations from stakeholders during Committee meetings. Presentations may cover existing federal, state, local, and private programs and the individuals served by the

programs, innovative local efforts, and efforts to coordinate programs within communities or regions.

- c. presentations or written reports from Legislative Fiscal Division staff as available on state-run programs related to hunger, if pertinent.

2. **Identify issues: January through March 2012.** Study activities during this period will include review of the information compiled to date, with Committee identification of issues it would like to address through further analysis or legislation.

This phase of the study will help the Committee focus its attention on those issues it considers to be of greatest importance, so members may obtain any additional information they would like to receive before identifying potential solutions and making any recommendations on study topics.

3. **Review and decide legislative options: March 2012-August 2012.** After compiling the background information, identifying issues, and researching options, the Committee will discuss and act on issues it wants to address through the legislative process or in other ways.

The table on the following page provides a listing of anticipated study activities and resources, as well as tentative dates for the activities and the amount of Committee meeting time each activity is anticipated to entail. ***The time estimates on P. 5 are based on the assumption that the Committee will adopt the proposal in the Draft Work Plan to devote 28% of its meeting time, or approximately 20 hours, to the HJR 8 study.***

If the Committee chooses a different allocation of time or a different level of involvement in the study, the activities would be revised accordingly.

Action Item: *Review, discuss, and adopt or revise the proposed study activities and allocation of Committee time.*

Study Activity	Source	Activity	Meeting Date	Committee Time
(1) Compile information on existing programs for reducing childhood hunger and improving access to nutritious foods	Staff research, DPHHS, OPI, private, and nonprofit organizations	Staff materials; panel presentation; public comment	September 2011	2 hours
(2) Identify gaps in existing programs and barriers to providing services to children throughout the state	DPHHS, OPI, private, and nonprofit organizations	Panel discussion; public comment	September 2011	1 hour
(3) Examine ways in which communities and organizations could work together to improve access, share expertise and information, and expand successful programs into new communities	Staff research, stakeholder input	Staff materials; panel presentation; public comment	November 2011	1.5 hours
(4) Look at ways to encourage the use of Montana farm products in schools and other facilities or programs that serve children	Staff research, Department of Agriculture or other state agencies, agriculture and farm-to-school groups	Staff materials; panel presentation; public comment	November 2011	1.5 hours
(5) Discuss policy changes needed to increase participation in existing programs or to improve existing programs, including tax policies	Stakeholder input	Discussion during panel presentations; public comment periods	Ongoing	3.5 hours
(6) Look for ways to use public funds strategically to produce efficiencies and raise awareness about childhood hunger	Stakeholder input, Legislative Fiscal Division	LFD presentation; stakeholder panel presentation	January 2011	1.5 hours
(7) Establish ways to measure the progress that existing or proposed programs are making to alleviate childhood hunger	State agency and stakeholder input	Staff materials or panel presentation; public comment	January 2011	1.5 hours
(8) Develop recommendations and, if desired, bill drafts for 2013 session	Committee members	Committee work sessions; public comment	March through August 2011	8 hours
			Total	20.5 hours

