Testimony to Legislative Budget Board re HHSC

Barbara Ramirez-Perez, Resident, Bastrop County

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Good morning. My name is Barbara Ramirez-Perez, and I am from Bastrop County, Texas. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I work in public education as a Student and Parent Education Specialist, serve on the board of our county food pantry, and help operate Eagle Bites, a school-based Feeding Futures Food Pantry serving families in our district.

But before I held any of those titles, I was a child who needed the very resources I am advocating for today.

I am here to advocate for Summer EBT because I have lived the need, I see the need, and now I have the opportunity to advocate for the families still experiencing it.

I lost my mother when I was four years old. My older sister stepped in and raised me alongside my siblings.

Growing up, resources were not always guaranteed. We knew what it meant to need assistance and to depend on programs and people willing to help our family get through difficult seasons.

I remember what it felt like to be the child on the receiving end of that help. Now, years later, I see that same need from the other side.

I work directly with families in public education, and I see parents doing everything they are supposed to do—working, raising their children, and trying to make ends meet—and still struggling to keep food on the table.

I understand that struggle personally, too. As a single mother, I know what it is like to work multiple jobs, continue my education, raise my children, serve my community, and still have to think carefully about how every dollar is spent.

Through my work with our county food pantry and Eagle Bites, I see families come through our doors needing help with something as basic and essential as groceries.

Hunger does not always look like what we expect it to look like.

Sometimes it looks like a parent working multiple jobs.

This advocate participated in programming that equips Texans most impacted by state budget decisions with the knowledge, skills, and support to advocate for policies that strengthen our communities.

Sometimes it looks like a child sitting quietly in a classroom. You can't always see their hunger. You can't always hear it. But it is there.

Sometimes it looks like a family doing everything they can and still coming up short.

In education, we often say: A fed kid is a focused kid.
During the school year, many children have access to breakfast and lunch at school. But when that final school bell rings for summer, their need for food doesn't disappear.

The meals do.

And when access to one food resource decreases, the need doesn't disappear either.

It moves.

It moves to our food pantries.

It moves to our schools.

It moves to our churches and nonprofits.

And ultimately, it moves back to the kitchen tables of families who are already trying to stretch every dollar they have.

In Bastrop County, we can see exactly what that looks like.

In 2025, the Bastrop County Emergency Food Pantry served more than 5,000 of our neighbors and distributed more than half a million pounds of food.

Then, during the summer of 2026—the very time when children were away from the school meals they rely on—our pantry reported that requests for food were 29% higher than the previous year.

I don't just know those numbers because I read them in a report.

I serve on that food pantry's board.

I see that demand in my own community. I see it through our pantry. I see it through Eagle Bites.

And I see it in the families I serve in public education. And Bastrop County is not alone.

Across the Houston region, SNAP participation declined by approximately 155,000 people between June 2025 and June 2026, while food pantries were simultaneously reporting increased demand.

My story is not unique.

The families I serve are living versions of it every day.

That is why I support strong investment in and access to Summer EBT.

Summer EBT gives eligible families additional grocery assistance during the summer, helping bridge the gap when children are away from the school meals they depend on.

This is not about replacing the responsibility of parents.

It is about supporting parents who are already carrying that responsibility.

It is about recognizing the reality facing working families and giving them a bridge during one of the most financially challenging times of the year.

I have seen what happens when communities provide that bridge.

I was once the child who benefited from community resources.

Today, I am the person helping connect families to those same kinds of resources.

And what I have learned from both sides is simple:

When families have access to resources at the right time, those resources work.

Summer EBT allows parents to purchase groceries where they already shop and make decisions about what their own children need.

And those dollars don't just support families—they support Texas communities.

Feeding Texas reported that Texas families received approximately $6.97 billion in SNAP benefits in 2024, generating an estimated $10.73 billion in economic activity.

So when we invest in food assistance, that money doesn't simply stop at a family's kitchen table.

It moves through our grocery stores, businesses, and local economies.

But for me, the most important return on that investment cannot be measured only in dollars.

It is measured in children.

It is the child who doesn't have to spend the summer worrying about food.

It is the parent who can put groceries in the refrigerator without having to choose which other bill won't get paid.

And it is the student who returns to our classroom in August healthy, nourished, and ready to learn.

We already know the need exists.Our food pantries are seeing it. Our schools are seeing it. Our families are living it.

Summer EBT gives Texas an opportunity to respond to that need before hunger becomes a crisis.

I urge our Texas lawmakers to support the funding and implementation necessary to ensure eligible Texas children have access to Summer EBT and to invest in strong outreach so families know how to access the benefit.

We cannot say that children are our future while overlooking one of their most basic needs today.

A fed kid is a focused kid.

A fed kid is healthier.

A fed kid is better prepared to learn, grow, and succeed.

I was once the child who needed these resources.

Today, I am the mother who understands the struggle.

I am the educator who sees the impact.

I am the food pantry leader who sees the need firsthand. And now, I am using my voice to advocate for the next child. School may stop for the summer. Hunger does not.

Thank you.