

Child Food Deprivation in Florida: Why won't DeSantis Act?

Background Information on Child Hunger in Florida

A US Census Bureau Survey of Florida households in June and July of 2021 found that 14% of adults reported kids are not eating enough as households couldn't afford food. These children are considered "food insecure." According to an article in the Tampa Bay Times dated 8/24/21, "Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration has not yet applied for up to \$820 million in food assistance to more than 2 million Florida children..."

According to the American Psychological Association "Studies show that food insufficiency is associated with a higher prevalence of poor health conditions (and) can negatively affect brain development, learning, information processing, and academic achievement in children."

The first three years of a child's life are a period of rapid brain development. Too little energy, protein and nutrients during this sensitive period can lead to lasting deficits in cognitive, social and emotional development. Other deficiencies in early childhood can cause brain impairment.

Hunger reduces a child's motor skills, activity level and motivation to explore the environment. Movement and exploration are important to cognitive development, and more active children elicit more stimulation and attention from their caregivers, which promotes social and emotional development.

School-age children who experience severe hunger are also at increased risk for the following negative outcomes: homelessness, chronic health conditions, stressful life conditions, mental distress, behavioral problems, and internalizing behavior such as, depression, anxiety, withdrawal and poor self-esteem.

Depriving children of nutritional food leads to catastrophic outcomes for our children and is not a good practice for the state of Florida. Now is the time to act before these children are in further need. Fighting child hunger is a "win win" as it improves the lives of Florida families and the success of our state.

Tampa Friends' Response

Because our Quaker faith tells us there is that of God in everyone, including children, we are called to aid the poor and helpless and to care for the vulnerable.

Tampa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, recognizing the severe problem of childhood hunger in Florida and society's moral duty to confront this, calls on our elected officials to apply for all Federal food assistance benefits to fully fund, among other programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. i. e. SNAP (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) and the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer program.

In addition, Tampa Monthly Meeting encourages a letter writing campaign to Governor DeSantis. Email the Governor at GovernorRon.Desantis@eog.myflorida.com and/or a phone call to the Governor's office at 850-717-9337.

For additional assistance, please call the State Assistance Information Line at 800-342-3557.