

"We Should Have No Child Going Hungry"

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I am a Child Nutrition Director who has been in the business of feeding children now for almost 28 years. I began my career in the schools as a cafeteria assistant. I have cooked, cleaned, and loved on many children over the years. It is through these experiences over the years, that have given me my passion to feed our children in Avery County. This is my home, my kids, my backyard. I have seen our children come in after a weekend of no food at home, asking for a second breakfast. I have seen children with lunch boxes and a plastic grocery bag wadded up inside in preparation to glean off their classmates' plates what they do not want to eat in hopes to take something home to eat that night.

This year, 2022-2023, I was so thankful when we found out that NC was funding the reduced-price breakfast and lunch copays, but this still left us to make sure our remaining full-price kids were not left behind. I know of families that have told their kids to not eat lunch in the cafeteria because they could not pay the bill - Mountain pride. Those children go all day without a meal because they are being obedient to their parents.

The need is great. Our children deserve to have a quality education just as much as they deserve to have a decent hot and healthy meal. Our district has very successfully pushed filling out the free and reduced applications so that we have our children covered that qualify but what about those that are on the edge of qualifying? Feeding America statistics estimate that 19% of food-insecure families do not qualify for free and reduced-price meals. I am certain that this is a true statement. In our small rural district, 19% of our students would be an additional 365 students who could potentially be food insecure and not qualify for free or reduced price meals.

With this snapshot into our small mountain county, it is my hope that our legislature would see the need to permanently and fully fund, and feed our most precious resource, our children. No-cost school meals would help greatly in eliminating child hunger, improving performance in the classroom during the school day, and addressing meal debt issues.

School nutrition should not be required to constantly beg for funding to make sure our precious, God-given gifts, are fed. These children are our future. What are we teaching them when we chose not to continue funding the program that was started because of a national emergency in the 1940s where military leaders testified to Congress that as many as 40% of recruits were rejected during World War II due to malnutrition? A hungry child cannot learn, and in the USA, we should have NO CHILD GOING HUNGRY.

