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Contacts:

Bob Dolgan, 773-843-7293, 773-447-1980 cell, bdolgan@gcfd.org

Jim Conwell, 773-843-2843, 773-531-3364 cell, jconwell@gcfd.org

Report offers roadmap for ending hunger in Illinois

State saw 15.2 percent increase in summer meals to children in 2014, yet opportunities remain to increase provision of school breakfast and capture agricultural surplus

CHICAGO (Sept. 1, 2015) – While hunger remains a challenge for nearly 2 million Illinois residents, a new report shows that progress is being made in several areas. In its annual report, the Illinois Commission to End Hunger highlights successes in providing meals to children while outlining the scope of hunger and offering plans for an agricultural surplus program. The Commission, a Governor-appointed body formed in 2010, provides a report annually to the Governor, Constitutional Officers and the General Assembly. Among the achievements cited:

- 15.2 percent increase in number of summer meals served to children statewide in 2014 versus 2013.
- 12.7 percent increase in school breakfast participation since the launch of a campaign two years ago.
- Passage of Senate Bill 1847, which will expand SNAP eligibility for 40,000 families in the state.

“No Illinoisan should ever have to go hungry, and I’m pleased to see that is closer to becoming a reality with the work by the Illinois Commission to End Hunger,” Governor Bruce Rauner said. “This is a serious issue facing the state, that has been improved by the recommendations and actions of this commission. It was the driving force behind a bill I signed this year to extend SNAP benefits to thousands of Illinoisans, and I look forward to see what it accomplishes next.”

Led by members of the Commission’s Benefits Access Working Group, Senate Bill 1847 passed both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly in May and was signed into law in July. The bill, effective January 1, 2016, will expand access to SNAP for 40,000 low-income working families in the state and generate \$60 million in economic stimulus. Twenty-six other states have adopted similar provisions.

“While much work remains, we are encouraged by the progress we have seen, in particular in addressing child hunger,” Kate Maehr, Executive Director and CEO, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and Co-Chair, Illinois Commission to End Hunger.

Members of the Commission’s No Kid Hungry Working Group help coordinate the statewide response to child hunger in the summer, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service Midwest Regional Office, and the Illinois State Board of Education. In 2014, Illinois provided 6,432,806 summer meals through more than 1,700 community centers, faith-based organizations and schools. The effort included new texting and social media platforms that helped families locate meals in their communities.

“Some of our students get their only meals at school, so it is extremely important we make sure they get the nutrition they need during the summer,” said State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith. “Our staff has been focused on expanding the summer program, and through our strong partnership with Illinois No Kid Hungry and focused marketing to families we’ve increased awareness in meals served in areas of need.”

While Illinois has increased the number of summer meals provided to children, it ranks 40th in the provision of school breakfast. As part of the national No Kid Hungry effort, the Rise and Shine Illinois campaign to expand school breakfast provided 38 grants to schools for breakfast infrastructure in its second year. The Emergency Food System Working Group of the Commission has developed a model for an agricultural surplus program that would provide financial benefits for growers and fresh food for people in need. Illinois’ local food production system does not yet include a unified statewide program to minimize the loss of surplus and unsellable produce. Agricultural surplus programs are already an effective strategy for addressing hunger in several states including Kentucky, Minnesota and Ohio.

ATTACHMENT: Illinois Commission to End Hunger 2015 Report

About the Illinois Commission to End Hunger

The Illinois General Assembly passed the Commission to End Hunger Act in 2010 so that no man, woman or child in Illinois should ever be faced with hunger. The Commission develops and implements an action plan and ensures cross-collaboration among government entities and community partners toward the goal of ending hunger in Illinois. The Governor appoints public members of the Commission while *ex officio* members are drawn from key state agencies. To learn more, visit www.endhunger.illinois.gov.