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Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation, but Maryland Children Missing Free Summer Meals State Taking Action to Reverse Slide, Serve More Low-Income Children

Baltimore, Md. – July 30, 2008 – Maryland's participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs slipped in July 2007, with just 21 percent of eligible low-income children in the state receiving summer meals, according to Maryland Hunger Solutions. Data from a national report by the Food Research and Action Center found that participation fell from serving more than 49,000 Maryland children in July 2006 to fewer than 43,000 in July 2007.

Families with tight budgets find themselves especially strapped during the summer when regular school lunches and breakfasts aren't available. The situation is even worse this summer as food and energy costs have risen dramatically over the past year. The Summer Nutrition programs, which include the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program, fill the food gap for the thousands of low-income Maryland children (and their families) who rely on school breakfast and lunch during the school year to help keep hunger at bay. Through these programs, children, aged 18 and under, can receive free meals at participating summer sites at schools, parks departments and nonprofits.

"We are very concerned about the drop-off, but Maryland reports that it is increasing efforts this summer with more outreach to families," said Kimberley Chin, director of Maryland Hunger Solutions, an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. "Too many children are missing out on summer meals, and Maryland needs to do all it can to ensure hungry children are surrounded by access to healthy food."

While participation in Maryland's Summer Nutrition Programs hovers slightly above the national average of 17.5 children receiving summer meals for every 100 eating lunch during the school year, the programs continue to fall short. If Maryland was able to boost its participation to serve 40 percent of eligible low-income children, the state would feed an additional 39,047 children and gain \$2.3 million in federal funds.

"This summer, we have done more outreach and more marketing to raise awareness of the Summer Food Service Program," said Bruce Schenkeo, program specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education. "Our efforts are working – we've seen an increase in the number of calls to our Summer Food Hotline, which connects families to nearby summer meal sites. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Maryland Hunger Solutions to reach even more low-income children."

In Maryland, families can find nearby summer meal sites by calling the Summer Food Service Program Hotline at 1-877-731-9300 or by going online to www.mdsummermeals.org.

About the report:

The Food Research and Action Center's annual summer report, *Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation*, gives data for all states and looks at national trends. The report measures participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs by comparing the number of children receiving summer meals to the number of children receiving school lunch during the school year. FRAC measures national summer participation during the month of July, when typically all children are out of school throughout the month and lose access to regular year school meals. The report is available online at www.frac.org/pdf/summer_report_2008.pdf.