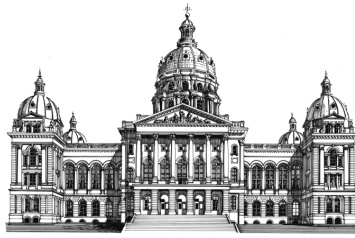


Charles Isenhart  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
72<sup>nd</sup> House District  
Statehouse: (515) 281-3221  
Email: charles.isenhart@legis.iowa.gov

HOME ADDRESS  
P.O. Box 3353  
Dubuque, IA 52004-3353  
Home: (563) 557-1261



## House of Representatives

State of Iowa  
*Ninetieth General Assembly*  
STATEHOUSE  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

## COMMITTEES

Agriculture  
Economic Growth & Technology  
Veterans Affairs  
Way and Means  
Health & Human Services Appropriations

Natural Resources  
and Infrastructure Committee, NCSL

# Summer EBT: Take 2 What about the Summer Food Service Program?

Comments made in points of personal privilege  
Iowa House of Representatives  
January 30, 2024

Colleagues, a quick update on my Summer EBT findings.

You received an e-mail from me last week with information on how you can co-sponsor House File 2042. That bill funds the administrative costs needed for Iowa to take advantage of \$28 million in federal funds so food insecure K-12 students have enough to eat this summer, meaning they can return to school in the fall healthy and ready to learn.

In my comments last week, I addressed the claim that federal food assistance programs promote childhood obesity. The evidence for that is thin, at best.

Today, I address the notion that existing childhood nutrition programs can be expanded and enhanced to fill the gap that remains, as the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education asserted in their Christmas eve news release.

The departments stated that “more than 1.6 million meals and snacks were served to children 18 and younger throughout Iowa as part of the Summer Food Service and Seamless Summer Option programs at 500-plus meal sites in low-income areas across Iowa.” Some counties and school districts, I have been told, have no meal sites.

I encourage each member to ask questions about what these programs actually look like in your counties and in your school districts. I did. Let me tell you what I found.

The Dubuque Community School District reports having 5,216 students eligible for free summer meals IF they can make it to the feeding sites at the right time and, of course, IF they like the food. The school district operated one program that served 240 people. The Dubuque Boys and Girls Club operated seven sites that served 700 students at least once during the summer, but not necessarily every day.

Let's do the math. Those 940 students represented less than 18 percent of the eligible kids! And oh, by the way, it cost the Boys and Girls Club \$24,000 or \$25 per student to administer the program – costs unreimbursed by either the state or federal government, costs that the Boys and Girls Club had to eat.

Under the Summer EBT program, the families of 100 percent of these students could receive \$40 per month per child for June, July and August to buy their own food and prepare their own meals. How is that not a better deal?

Now, I am not criticizing the Summer Food Service program itself. It's good for the families that take advantage of it. And the food is no doubt healthy.

But this should not be an either-or scenario. It can and should be both-and! Dubuque School students represent just more than 2 percent of 230,000-plus children who could benefit from the Summer EBT program. Do some due diligence of your own to determine the current reality for students in your own districts.

Meanwhile, how does the Department of Education propose to expand and enhance the existing programs? We don't know. We don't see anything for an expansion in the budgets of either the Department of Education or the Department of Health and Human Services. And after multiple e-mails requesting further information over the past month, I have received no answers from either of the departments.

So, while all that gets figured out, how about we do the right thing: Give the governor the administrative funding she needs to put \$28 million into the hands of Iowa parents who will use it to put \$28 million into the Iowa economy for to put protein on the plates of their children.

I thank you for your attention.