

Testimony of

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**Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request Act of 2009
Department of Parks and Recreation
Committee on Libraries, Parks, and Recreation
Council of the District of Columbia**

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**Council Chambers
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Room 412
Washington, DC 20004**

Chairman Thomas and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Alexandra Ashbrook and I direct D.C. Hunger Solutions, an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. D.C. Hunger Solutions works to create a hunger-free community and improve the nutrition, health, economic security, and well-being of low-income people.

The D.C. Free Summer Meals Program, which provides low-income children nutritious snacks and meals at parks, recreation centers, schools, and other community sites, is an essential tool to fighting hunger during the months when school is out. It also pumps millions of federal dollars –3.3 million in summer 2007 alone— into the local economy. And because federally-funded summer meals must meet federal nutrition standards, the program also can fight childhood obesity.

The District Department of Parks and Recreation’s leadership role in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program has been key to the tremendous growth in the number of

children receiving free, nutritious summer meals: up from 13,200 in 2002 to 29,000 in 2007. In summer 2008, DPR sponsored 263 out of 329 sites. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of DPR, participation in the program last summer fell by more than 2,000 children because in large part about sixty schools did not serve as sites for the program. As such, DPR's commitment to the program is more important than ever in ensuring that the program continues to feed the growing numbers of low-income children and earn the number-one national ranking by the Food Research and Action Center for years to come.

The summer meals program not only supports children's health and nutrition, but it also supports quality programming that keeps children and teens safe, learning, engaged, and active while their parents are at work. Children who do not have access to quality summer program experience learning loss during the summer. Studies find that low-income children have higher rates of summer learning loss than their higher-income peers, but that high quality summer programs can prevent that loss. The meals and snacks provided through D.C. Free Summer Meals act like a magnet, drawing children to summer programs and providing programs with federal funding for the nutrition necessary for children to be fully engaged throughout the program.

This year, hundreds of community programs and thousands of children will need DPR's support more than ever. The D.C. Free Summer Meal brings in millions of dollars each year in federal funds to feed hungry children. All federal nutrition programs are crucial in "normal" economic times, but they are even more essential in this period of deep economic pain when high food prices and the growing recession are forcing District families to make tough choices about meeting their basic needs.

Thanks to the efforts of Councilmember Thomas, the Office of the Superintendent of Education, Wellness and Nutrition Services, and Mark McCain, the Director of DPR's Summer Feeding Program, DPR is on target for serving a growing number of sites this summer. We know that "hunger does not take a vacation" and we all must ramp up our efforts to ensure that children have access to consistent, nutritious food every day in these unprecedented times by:

- 1) Conducting outreach to connect children to summer feeding sites
- 2) Filling any gaps in the location of summer feeding sites in each ward by recruiting schools or community groups to become sites
- 3) Supporting DPR's efforts to serve low-income children supper by advocating for the D.C. to become the 11th state to become a federal Afterschool Supper state

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the role federal nutrition programs play in supporting our city's children and thank Councilmember Thomas for his support of the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program and quality summer programs.

Submitted by:

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