

## Food Security Council

December 19, 2023

10:00 a.m.

### Meeting Notes and Next Steps

#### Welcome

Dr. Edward Simmer

- Dr. Edward Simmer, director of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and chair of the Food Security Council (Council), welcomed members of the Council (Council) and the public. He provided a brief overview of the guiding proviso and charge of the Council. He also reminded individuals that the meeting would be recorded. A recording of the meeting is available at [scdhec.gov/fsc](https://scdhec.gov/fsc).
- Council members in attendance included:
  - Dr. Ed Simmer, Council Chair
  - Dr. Rhea Bentley, South Carolina State University-Public Service Activities
  - Virgie Chambers, South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE)
  - Amber Gillum, South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS)
  - Rowan Goodrich, South Carolina Department on Aging (SCDOA)
  - Dr. Tarana Khan, Clemson University-Public Service Activities
  - Dr. Kevin Wessinger, South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
  - Bentley White, DHEC
  - Chris Whitmire, South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA)

#### Progress Update

Dr. Edward Simmer

- Dr. Simmer gave an update on the progress of the Council and its work to finalize recommendations and draft a report to be presented to the General Assembly. He stated that actions taken by the Council would be incorporated into a draft report for review by the Council.

#### Recommendations Discussion + Voting

All

- Dr. Simmer began the recommendations and voting portion of the day's discussion by providing an overview of the process for which the discussion and voting would take place. He shared that a total of 18 recommendations were proposed by Council members. Each Council member who proposed a recommendation would be asked to provide a summary of the recommendation, prior to opening the floor for discussion and voting.
  - **Recommendation #1:** Fund Change SC Program Expansion
    - Chris Whitmire gave a summary of a recommendation to support funding to expand the Change SC Program to help address food insecurity. The increased funding would expand the program to boost infrastructure, raise awareness, increase demand for healthy foods, and conduct baseline research. The SCDA is requesting one-time state funding of \$3 million dollars in FY 2025. The recommendation is to support this state funding request and the program.

- The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #1 for public comment.
- **Recommendations #2 and #3: SC Food Policy Council Request for Partnership + SC Food Policy Council Funding**
  - Recommendations #2 and #3 were recommended by Dr. Tarana Khan and Dr. Rhea Bentley. . Dr. Bentley stated that the recommendation requested that the South Carolina Food Policy Council be funded. The funding request is for \$185,900 and would fund a state director, program coordinator, and other associated costs. The Food Policy Council serves as a robust state-level, cross-sector organization that has the capacity to enhance and act on the Council’s work.
    - Amber Gillum requested that the recommendations be tabled for additional discussion to ensure that the recommendations were not duplicating potential federal funding sources through SNAP-Ed.
    - Chris Whitmire also requested clarification concerning funding.
      - The Council voted unanimously to table recommendations #2 and #3 for further discussion and to be voted upon at the next Council meeting. The recommendations were moved forward for public comment and may not be included in the final recommendations.
- **Recommendation #4: Promote and expand the Summer Break Café (Summer Program Food Service)**
  - Virgie Chambers reviewed the recommendation. In evaluating existing gaps, Chambers stated that there is a need for greater coverage of program food services during summer months. Under the recommendation, local communities and stakeholders must work collaboratively with the SCDE to increase promotion and awareness of Summer Program Food Service (Summer Break Café) opportunities, which can lead to additional viable sponsors and accessible sites for the program.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #4 for public comment.
- **Recommendation #5: Create or invest in a statewide organization to facilitate implementation of the Council’s findings and recommendations.**
  - Bentley White offered a summary overview of the recommendation. The recommendation asks for the creation of an organization that does not currently exist or requesting funding for an existing statewide organization to facilitate the Council’s findings and recommendations. This includes funding for an executive director. White stated that the recommendation was similar to

recommendation #2 and #3. However, the recommendation does not specify a specific entity.

- Gillum requested clarity on what the duties/role of the individual and/or organization would be concerning implementation of the Council's recommendations. White stated that the intent was to focus on bringing stakeholders together.
  - Whitmire asked if White would envision the position/organization to include the possibility of future recommendations to the General Assembly or if it would be limited to facilitating and reporting back on the progress of the Council. White explained that it would need to tie it back to what was in the initial report.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #5 for public comment.
- **Recommendation #6:** Establish a statewide web-based care coordination referral system that addresses food insecurity, among other social determinants of health.
- White stated that the recommendation was to invest in a closed-looped care coordination system that could be used to connect individuals with social needs to community-based organizations that would provide those resources.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #6 for public comment.
- **Recommendation #7:** Address challenges facing food donation including liability protection and education.
- White stated that the recommendation requests the exploration of changes in state law related to liability protection and increasing education and resources pertaining to food donation, including liability protection.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #7 for public comment.
- **Recommendation #8:** Expand community garden programs in the state.
- White explained that the recommendation is to support state funding to promote DHEC's work with partners to expand or create additional community garden programs through providing necessary resources at the local level.
    - Rowan Goodrich requested that SCDOA be named as a stakeholder in the recommendation.
    - Dr. Bentley requested that the SC State 1890 Research and Extension be included as a stakeholder in the recommendation.
    - Both Aging and SC State 1890 Research and Extension provide support for community gardens.
      - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #8 for public comment.

- **Recommendation #9:** Increase the availability of fresh produce at variety stores.
  - White stated that the recommendation focuses on evaluating ways to incentivize variety stores to carry fresh produce, including expanding the acceptance for programs such as WIC and exploring where stores are located, if stores offer fresh produce, and what programs they participate in, e.g., WIC, SNAP.
    - Chambers requested examples of variety stores. White provided Dollar General, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree as examples, but eligibility would not be limited to these examples.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #9 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #10:** Develop a one-stop eligibility system for public programs and services.
  - White provided a summary of the recommendation to develop a one-stop system for programs and services that have eligibility requirements. Examples included WIC and SNAP. The purpose of the recommendation would be to streamline access and increase coordination and data sharing among different programs to enable the state to optimize resource allocation and identify gaps in service delivery.
    - Gillum stated she would have questions and concerns about programs that have federal requirements around eligibility determination that the state may not have the ability to change. She also shared that DSS is currently in the process of replacing the eligibility system for SNAP. White stated that federal requirements, cost effectiveness and systems communication would need to be explored.
    - Gillum asked for clarity concerning the language to explore or develop.
    - Dr. Kevin Wessinger also raised issues with understanding the recommendations and reconciling with federal rules related to Medicaid eligibility. He stated that ultimately each agency that has federal rules has to maintain their own eligibility guidelines and that would be hard to do in a one-stop system.
    - Dr. Simmer asked the Council how it would like to proceed.
      - Gillum recommended amending the recommendations language.
        - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #10 with the following amended language: ***“Explore the potential of a “no-wrong” door application and/or eligibility system to make it easier for the public to access public programs and services across agencies.”***

- **Recommendation #11:** Allow qualifying persons with a drug felony conviction to be eligible to receive SNAP benefits in South Carolina.
  - White stated that South Carolina is the only state in the country that has a lifetime ban on benefits for individuals that have a felony drug conviction. The recommendation focuses on legislation at the state level to modify or lift this federal ban. South Carolina is the only state with a lifetime ban. All other states have modified or removed the ban. DSS would be the lead agency.
    - Gillum added that from the perspective of DSS the recommendation has minimal operational impacts. The recommendation is a policy matter.
      - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #11 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #12:** Create a centralized food resource map for combating food insecurity.
  - White reviewed the recommendation to request potential funding to create a centralized statewide food resource map that would incorporate public facing resources as layers to locate food insecurity resources. She said that it could be combined or added to other recommendations.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #12 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #13:** Promote farmers and farmers' market participation in the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).
  - White stated that the recommendation provides for one-time funding for a campaign to promote increased farmer participation in the WIC FMNP program in communities statewide.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #13 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #14:** Expand the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
  - Gillum explained that DSS has been able to expand the Senior Farmers Market Program to all 46 counties. However, they have never been able to meet the potential demand within the federal funding level. The recommendation supports the department's state funding request to supplement the federal funding to serve approximately 10,000 additional seniors per year (35,000 total) and maintain a \$50 benefit level.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #14 for public comment.

- **Recommendation #15:** Increase the Gross Income Limit for SNAP Benefits.
  - Gillum stated that the recommendation is to support raising the gross income limit for SNAP benefits to 150% Federal Poverty Level and providing the funding necessary for DSS to implement the expansion. This would significantly increase the number of South Carolina residents potentially eligible for federal assistance.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #15 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #16:** Increase Coordination between SNAP and WIC.
  - Gillum provided an overview of the recommendation, which recommends that DSS and DHEC collaborate to identify and implement strategies to maximize the number of eligible families enrolled in SNAP and WIC. Potential strategies to consider should include, at a minimum, targeted marketing and outreach activities, data sharing, and streamlining of application processes.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #16 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #17:** Barrier Removal Strategies.
  - Gillum stated that the recommendation evaluates the provision of state funds to implement state and local level strategies that address barriers and increase access to nutritious food essential to health and well-being. This includes physical access issues. Strategies to consider may include grants to cover annual grocery delivery services for elderly or those with a physical disability, incentives for farmers to offer additional locations/venues for target populations to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables (e.g., senior centers), grants for non-profit organizations to test/implement local strategies (e.g., transportation services), and grants/incentives to increase farmers' participation in state programs (i.e., Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Healthy Bucks, etc.).
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #17 for public comment.
  
- **Recommendation #18:** Summer EBT
  - Gillum reviewed the recommendation. The recommendation centers around requesting the legislature consider adopting the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program and additional resources to support the program.
  - Dr. Simmer recommended amending the recommendations language.
    - The Council voted unanimously to approve recommendation #18 with the following amended language: ***“Recommend implementation and funding of Summer EBT program in Summer 2025.”***

**Wrap-Up + Next Steps****All**

- The Council's recommendations were posted online for public comment. The public comment period is scheduled to end on Jan. 2, 2024 at 5:00 P.M.
- The next meeting will be held on Jan. 4, 2024. During that meeting, the Council will review the recommendations and submitted public comments. The goal is to also review a draft report.
- By Jan. 17, 2024, the Council will provide feedback and suggested revisions to the draft report.
- On Jan. 22, the Council will meet to finalize and approve the report.
- By Jan. 31, DHEC will submit the report to the General Assembly on behalf of the Council.