State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Testimony of
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Before the

Education Committee
Wednesday, March 16, 2005

SB 1309, AAC School Nutrition

Good afternoon Sen. Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. PCSW and the Connecticut Women's Health Campaign (CWHC) support passage of SB 1309, which will require a daily minimum period of physical activity for students, the establishment of committees to monitor and implement nutrition and physical activity policies, as well as the limitation of the types of beverages and snacks made available to students. All of these requirements will lead to better nutrition for our children.

Early nutrition is key to preventing several diseases and conditions that disproportionately affect the lives of women, particularly osteoporosis, obesity, and diabetes, as well as diseases which affect both men and women such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. For example, osteoporosis is a serious degenerative bone condition that affects 28 million people in the United States, the vast majority of whom – a full 80% - are women[1]. Two significant causes of osteoporosis are poor nutrition and lack of exercise in childhood and the teen

[1] Connecticut Women's Health Campaign. (2003) Briefing Papers: Osteoporosis Prevention and Treatment. p. 20.

years[2]. In fact, osteoporosis has been characterized as a 'pediatric epidemic with a geriatric outcome.'[3] Osteoporosis is largely preventable with proper nutrition and adequate exercise during childhood and adolescence. This is when calcium is deposited in the bones, making them dense and healthy. Later in life, after the age of thirty, calcium is depleted from the bones.

We know that the most inexpensive foods are high in fat and low in nutritional value. Unfortunately, these foods end up in some homes due to the financial constraints of families. However, school is one place that children should not be limited in their choice of healthy foods or opportunities for physical activity. Obesity, eating disorders, diabetes and other medical conditions can be reduced if our children have access to healthy food and opportunities for adequate physical activity at school.

While schools continue to make significant strides in improving the nutritional content of meals served in their cafeterias, these meals are supplemented by an array of choices from vending machines that frequently offer fatty, salty and sugar-based foods that are not as healthy as cafeteria meals. Although there are regulations that require schools to turn off vending machines one half hour before and after any federally funded meal program, many students still have access to the vending machines at other times of the day. If the only food and beverages available in those machines are unhealthy, that is what children will eat - laying a foundation for poor snacking choices that can cause severe health problems later in life.

As health care costs continue to rise, we cannot afford to ignore the steps that can be taken to *prevent* illness and poor health. We have rules and regulations to protect our children from all sorts of harm, including fire codes, building codes and other safety rules. We can also protect our children from illnesses we know how to prevent, and our society from health care costs we should not have to bear. SB 1309 is an important step in the right direction. We urge your support of this proposal.

Thank you.

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.