

Good Morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano, members of the Human Services committee.

My name is Cheryl Rautio. I belong to End Hunger Connecticut and sit on the Board of Directors for the Ashford Food Program. This Program is unique as it is Not an Emergency Food Program. This program is funded by a Small Cities Grant and has been in operation for twelve years. We service twenty five seniors as well as 9-15 families with children in the community. Congregate meals served in town are only accessed by less than 15% of persons who are entitled to receive them.

Five years ago while at a local Ct Farmers Market I realized there were a large number of Seniors shopping with what looked like Food stamps but were slightly different in appearance. I started a conversation with a senior shopper because curiosity was great on my part. I was told that they were Senior Farmers Market coupons and were accepted at all Farmers Markets in Connecticut. I was then introduced to the woman at the Senior Center who distributed these coupons. After some conversation we accessed the coupons for seniors in Ashford living at the Senior Housing. For three years I supplied names, addresses, and phone numbers for those seniors who got the Food Program. At the beginning of the fourth year however, I was informed that we were not going to get the coupons for lack of money. This group of people consistantly ask if and when they can receive these coupons again. I have not even been able to get them on the right list. The challenge of seniors living in a small rural setting is having access to these coupons. Many can not access coupons because of transportation and money issues. The need for Farmers Market coupons far outweighs the money that is now funded. Less than half of all seniors who qualify for these coupons receive them. All of them would benefit from fruits and vegetables that this program provides. I know of no senior that receives these coupons that does not use them to the fullest. This program is not only a win for Connecticut Seniors but also the small Connecticut farmers.

I am asking this committee to please think seriously about Proposed S.B.382 and Proposed H.B. No.6277 AN Act concerning an appropriation to increase the funding for Elderly Nutrition Programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the seniors in Connecticut.