

**Testimony for Committee on Aging Public Hearing Regarding  
HB 6277, An Act Concerning Funding for Elderly Nutrition Programs**

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Just under a year ago on February 23, 2006, I testified in support of S.B. 171 – An Act Concerning Funding for Elderly Nutrition Programs so it feels like déjà vu all over again. I thank you for the opportunity to be here today to testify on behalf of the citizen's of New Haven. From Nov. 2001-February 2006. I held the position of Director of Elderly Services for the City of New Haven. Last February I changed positions within the City but my interest in this program hasn't waivered and that is why I am here today. During my 4+ years as Director, I had the opportunity to get to know the elderly nutrition programs as our senior centers are the sites for the Department of Social Services Elderly Nutrition Senior Café Program my office administered the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

It was in 2003 that the Department was asked to assist in distributing the coupon booklets by our local CAP agency since we had access to our senior population through the seven city-run senior centers which hosted the Senior Café program. I quickly learned that the demand for booklets was greater then the supply. At that time, the City was allocated a total of 260 booklets; an incredibly low number of booklets for a municipality with an estimated population of 13,000 people over the age of 65. I also questioned the requirement from our CaP that only those who utilized the meal program be given vouchers since I felt we should try to reach other seniors who were food insecure who were not receiving a balanced meal through our Senior Café program. It was this way of thinking that led me to Rick Mascuga, CT Department of Agriculture. Through research and conversations, that I was able to discern how the number of coupon booklets distributed to each participating municipality was designated. According to various resources, when the State began the program, the Department of Agriculture consulted with the Department of Social Services, Elderly Services Department, who suggested that the local Community Action Agencies be contacted to determine how many booklets each agency would like to receive since the CAP agencies managed the Elderly Nutrition program. Based on their responses, the coupon booklets were allotted accordingly.

In New Haven, the CAP requested a total of 260 coupon booklets, which is far below the number of booklets requested and received in other municipalities (Stamford=1,549 booklets, Waterbury=1,686 booklets, Hartford=2,802 booklets, Middletown=920 booklets, New Britian=433 booklets). Unfortunately, the City of New Haven was never contacted or consulted on this matter, and as a result, the number of coupon booklets that were allotted to New Haven was and is exceedingly low.

After many conversations with Mr. Mascuga, and with the help of Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, the City, in 2005, was able to acquire an additional 250 voucher booklets due to the federal funding received that year, bringing our total to 510. We were grateful for the

increase however; the demand for the booklets is still not being met based on the low number of voucher booklets received.

Since coupon booklets are distributed based on an individual's income, it is important to note that the City of New Haven, Department of Elderly Services alone processed almost 4,000 Rent Rebates in 2006. This number indicates that there is a large population who would be eligible, and would benefit, from the farmers market program.

Of course, in order to benefit from the program, seniors need to have access to farmers' markets. In 2005, the City became home to four farmers' markets, run by CitySeed a local non-profit organization. The four markets operate on weekdays and weekends and are located in various locations throughout the City.

In 2005, to promote the use of vouchers, the Department of Elderly Services partnered with CitySeed to promote the markets at our centers and in our housing facilities. We provided nutrition programs on the benefits of eating fresh, local produce to our senior population. The Department also provided transportation to the Fair Haven Market. The Fair Haven neighborhood, one of the more economically challenged neighborhoods in the City, has a large concentration of elderly housing, therefore, it seemed fitting to disburse more of the additional vouchers in this area. By providing transportation to the market, we ensured that people had access to the markets by removing a huge barrier-transportation.

The need for more vouchers is evident in that the New Haven markets became the first markets in the state to accept EBT (electronic food stamps) and redeemed over \$40,000 in WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Coupons for nutritionally at-risk women, infants, children and seniors in its first year.

New Haven was also the first city in the State to implement the WIC program at Farmers' Markets for Mothers with Children, which was later extended to seniors. It seems odd to me that in the very City that began this great program turned out be the City who least benefited from the program when compared to other cities of its size.

Although the City of New Haven does receive a disproportionate number of vouchers compared to other places in CT, and we certainly want to receive our fair share, we would not want to take away vouchers from other places. The way to rectify this to review redemption rates, provide funding for marketing of the program and the removal of barriers (i.e transportation) and add voucher booklets accordingly. By doing so, the State of Connecticut's low-income senior population will be benefited with the beautiful bounty of our home-grown produce.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.