

**Testimony on SB 1381: AN ACT CONCERNING APPROPRIATIONS
TO THE DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND AGRICULTURE.**

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Just over a year ago on February 23, 2006, I testified to the Committee on Aging in support of S.B. 171 – An Act Concerning Funding for Elderly Nutrition Programs. I thank you for the opportunity 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 wavered and that is why I am here today. During my 4+ years as Director, I had the opportunity assist in the administration of the elderly nutrition programs as our senior centers are the sites for the Department of Social Services Elderly Nutrition Senior Café Program and my office administered the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

In 2003 the Department was asked by the CAP agency to assist in distributing the coupon booklets since we had access to our senior population through our seven city-operated senior centers. It was evident that the demand for booklets was greater than the supply. At that time, the City was allocated a total of 260 booklets; an incredibly low number 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. This led me to Rick Mascuga, CT Department of Agriculture. Through research and conversations, I was able to discern how the number of coupon booklets distributed to each participating municipality was designated. According to various sources, when the State began the program, the Department of Agriculture consulted with the DSS, Elderly Services, who suggested that the local Community Action Agencies be contacted to determine how many booklets each agency would like to receive. Based on the CAPs 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 Britain=433 booklets). Unfortunately, the City of New Haven was never contacted or consulted on this matter, and as a result, the numbers of coupon booklets that were allotted to New Haven was, and still 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. While we were grateful for the increase, 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 also 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 Fair Haven neighborhood, one of the more economically challenged neighborhoods in the City, has a large concentration of elderly housing, therefore, we disbursed more of the additional vouchers in this area and provided transportation from the elderly housing complexes to the market thus removing a huge barrier to access.

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 the pilot for the implementation of the WIC program at Farmers' Markets, 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.

Although the City of New Haven now receives 1,500 coupon booklets (an increase given to us this year) the number of residents eligible for the vouchers is much higher. The way to rectify the numbers of seniors who go without coupons is to increase the funding to this wonderful program and to promote use of vouchers by providing funding for marketing and the removal of barriers (i.e. transportation). By doing so, the State of Connecticut's low-income senior population will benefit with the beautiful bounty of our home-grown produce.