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Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:

Lucy Nolan

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7350

Testimony opposed to H. B. No. 7350 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION
OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY
Before the Education Committee on March 12, 2007

Good day Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. I am here today in opposition to Raised H. B. 7350, An Act Concerning the Prevention of Childhood Obesity.

This legislation, while seemingly well intentioned, falls short on its effectiveness in preventing childhood obesity. We believe that reporting a child's weight to his or her parents without the proper support or tools to create needed change will not take care of the problem. Families need nutritional and exercise information, children, particularly urban children, need safe places to recreate and programs to help them become more active and to learn about healthier food choices. This type of legislation has not been effective in other parts of the country and has led to increased issues with food for younger and younger children. The legislature took an important step last year in decreasing the availability of junk food and drink for children in our schools; however we need to increase physical activity and stop thinking about using sugary and junk food as fundraisers for the schools. These steps will do more to decrease childhood obesity than sending home information that most parents already know yet don't know how to change behaviors.

End Hunger Connecticut! is particularly opposed to a child's BMI being used as a Report Card, or report to parents, for the very reason that many food insecure people are also overweight and obese. Until there are adequate steps and resources for this population there is no point in telling an already stressed parent, who may not be able to afford healthy food – or food at all – or lives in a neighborhood where it is not safe for the child to play outside that his or her child is overweight and imply that something must be done. The Food Stamp Program is still working under the economically deficient "Thrifty Food Plan" devised over 20 years ago, food from pantries tend to be highly processed so they can sit on a shelf for some time, and the highly processed junk food is cheaper and far more accessible than higher quality nutritional foods. Until we have adequate nutrition education, as well as affordable and accessible healthier foods, we cannot expect those with low-incomes to individually change. However changing the environment that children are in that can make a huge difference and affect habits in lifestyle choices. Additionally, as a community as a whole sees the need, change may happen faster.

The Body Mass Index is only one factor in determining a person's health therefore we need to be particularly careful of how that information is used. The BMI does not take into account a person's lean body mass, body frame or muscle mass. Primarily, that is why it is so important that the measurement is specifically BMI for Children and Teens, which this legislation does not specify, as this specific measurement takes into account the differences in body mass in children

as they age and is gender specific. Not only is height and weight recorded, but also gender, date of birth and date of the measurement. BMI for Children and Teens is the most accurate measurement for children and teens, and must be the specified term of measurement in any legislation.

This information is already on the blue form, when a child sees a doctor. Given the rapidly changing weight of pre-adolescents it is very important that other factors in the child's life are explored. For some time right before puberty children often appear and may weigh heavier than what would be considered healthier, but within a matter of days a growth spurt may occur and that child is at the appropriate weight. It is critically important that the whole child is evaluated when this information is recorded so that questions can be answered and information can be accessed right away. Sixth grade is also a critical time for a child's self image and given the information we know about body image we need to be especially careful that this legislation does not create deep and lasting psychological damage and eating disorders.

End Hunger Connecticut! supports legislation that creates anonymous data that will help us move forward in creating policy in the state to hold down the obesity rates. Schools are a good place to gather this information, as it can determine if certain policies are effective. Children learn lifelong lessons in their schools, and so an emphasis on the school's community health would be very helpful. Due in part to the passage of last year's school nutrition legislation, Connecticut received a "B" on the University of Baltimore Obesity Report Card (<http://www.ubalt.edu/experts/obesity/>) for our state policies on obesity – no state received an "A". Having a data base for children's BMI could put us in the A category. Also, it may allow communities to access the accessibility of quality or nutritional food in a community or school – creating Farmer's Markets in neighborhoods, or fresh fruit and vegetable programs in school. There is so much that reliable data can do in regard to creating good health policy.

Connecticut is well on its way to becoming one of the top states in the nation to care for our children's health as adults. Ultimately what we do today will be seen in the future with savings in health care costs and a healthy workforce. BMI for Children and Teens can be done to affect our public policy, but not specifically on a child by child basis unless and until there is adequate public policy that addresses the issue and helps children and families deal with weight issues. I urge you not to pass this legislation out of committee.

Thank you.