**Testimony for Committee on Aging Public Hearing Regarding Proposed H.B. 6277, An Act Increasing Funding for Elderly Nutrition Programs**

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Submitted by Darcey Lynn Cobbs, Director of Elderly Services, City of New Haven, Tel. 203-946-7854

Thank you for allowing me the time to present testimony today on behalf of the City of New Haven. I was appointed to this position in April of 2006 by our Mayor of New Haven Mr. John Destefano Jr. Over the past ten months I have had the opportunity to experience and work with the elderly nutrition program in two capacities. Through the Department of Social Services Elderly Nutrition Senior Café Program that provides hot meals at all six of the City of New Haven Senior Centers and the farmers market voucher booklets.

The City of New Haven received a greatly appreciated increase in coupon booklets in 2006. The 1,600 coupon booklets received were distributed through the Department of Elderly Services at our senior centers, through coordination with the Resident Coordinators of the City of New Haven Housing Authority properties, in conjunction with several private housing facilities and with the Department of Elderly Services outreach staff who work with area low income seniors in their private residences.

Of concern to my office was that seniors not only receive the coupon vouchers but that they were able to redeem them. In 2006 the City of New Haven Department of Elderly Services continued and expanded its transportation program for seniors to the Farmers Markets around the city of New Haven. In August of 2006 we transported 212 seniors to The New Haven Free Public Library for a Senior Day Downtown. On that day seniors not only were able to experience downtown New Haven but were also provided with their farmers market coupons and shopped at the City Hall Farmers Market. Additional transportation was provided on several occasions to the Fairhaven Farmers Market and was open to resident living in New Haven Housing Authority properties and several other senior housing communities. We estimate that approximately 500 seniors were provided transportation directly to a farmers market during the summer 2006. The City of New Haven found the transportation program to be largely successful for seniors without transportation to make use of their coupon vouchers for healthy fruits and vegetables. As a result, the City of New Haven is again poised to continue transporting seniors to the city farmers markets with continued expansion for the summer 2007.

While the increase in coupon vouchers in appreciated and much needed in New Haven, we were unable to fulfill the total demand. The 1,600 coupon booklets within a short 4 week time frame were distributed across the city. Telephone calls continued to come into my office requesting coupon vouchers long after all had been distributed. We received calls form not only New Haven residents but also from seniors in Hamden, Milford, Orange and Bridgeport. To give you an idea of the number of senior who qualify for the coupon vouchers, in New Haven we processed approximately 4,000 rental rebate

applications in 2006 and 1,600 coupon voucher is not enough to satisfy this population in need and doesn't consider those who are very low income non-renting seniors who our staff work with in their homes.

In closing, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony to you all today. It is inevitable that we will all be seniors one day. I ask that you consider the needs of senior not just in New Haven but across the state as I would venture to say that we are not an anomaly in New Haven. The demand for this small contribution to the healthy diet of seniors is essential for the support of a healthy lifestyle for them.

There are many challenges I face in my position as the Director of Elderly Services and in my ten months in the position one of the most difficult days for me was a hot August afternoon when I had to look into the eyes of a low income New Haven senior who had taken two busses and walked several blocks to my office to see if we had any coupon vouchers left and tell her that I was sorry but we have no more. It is my hope to not have to deliver this same news again next summer. So today, I ask that the Elderly Nutrition Farmers Market Coupon Vouchers program be fully funded for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008.

I thank you again for this opportunity to speak with you today.