



END HUNGER CONNECTICUT!

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**Testimony of Lucy Nolan in support of SB 1381, AAC Appropriations for the Departments of Social Services and Agriculture  
Support for SB 1338, An Act Concerning A Cost of Living Increase for Private Providers of Health and Human Services and,  
SB 1396, An Act Concerning the State Purchase of Contracts for Health and Human Services**

March 13, 2007

Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization with over 1,000 members, most of whom are the emergency feeding sites, such as food pantries and soup kitchens. I am here today to speak enthusiastically in favor of SB 1381 An Act Concerning Appropriations to the Departments of Social Services and Agriculture. Additionally, while I will not testify on these issues we are in support of SB 1396, An Act Concerning the State Purchase of Contracts for Health and Human Services, and SB 1338, An Act Concerning A Cost of Living Increase for Private Providers of Health and Human Services and as members of the Non-Profit Cabinet we agree with their testimony.

We would like to thank you for listening to and creating a looking at the emergency food system's needs, particularly in regards to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and adding \$2 million for funds in SB 1381. SB 1381 also adds critically needed funding for the elderly through additional funding for the Meals on Wheels and congregate meal programs, and to increase the state's share of funding the Senior's Farmer's Market Program.

As you know, the state of Connecticut gives very little in dollars to feed the hungry. The only general fund money that is earmarked to alleviate hunger is \$360,000 dollars, which is matched in federal SSBG funds for a total of \$636,468 for the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SSNAP. The regional food banks use this money to purchase high protein foods to be distributed to food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. High protein foods are expensive to buy and are not usually available through donations. This food also is the only reliable food that the emergency food system can count on – both in that will be coming and for what it is.

100% of the state money that goes into the SSNAP account is used to buy nutritious high protein foods - foods that are not generally donated to the food banks, such as chicken, meat, tuna, and peanut butter, and are bought for distribution to local sites. The state's two food banks, Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare, charge no more than .05 cents per pound of food to help defray the administrative cost, which they pay out of their own budgets. I should note that often they do not charge this at all. This is probably the MOST cost-effective money the state spends. Not only is this the only money the state gives to the food banks but much of this food is distributed to faith-based organizations that are the bulk of the emergency food system.

Compared to neighboring states Connecticut provides little to feed the very needy. Massachusetts funds the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program at \$12 million, New York at \$22.5 million, New Jersey at \$4 million, Ohio at \$7.4 million, and Pennsylvania at \$18.75 million, while Connecticut general fund monies spent on SSNAP are \$345,000. Putting an additional \$2 million dollars into this program would help countless people in the state to get food that is not only good for them but that is expensive to buy, is not generally donated and is nutritionally very sound. Placing additional funds in this line item also goes a long way to offering nutritionally quality food that will help the food insecure with health and obesity issues.

Elderly individuals, living on fixed incomes, often must choose between buying food and paying for prescriptions and other necessities. Through EHC!'s food stamp outreach we see seniors struggling to make ends meet. The Food Stamp Program often offers an inadequate benefit and the rules of the program can be confusing to seniors. The Elderly Nutrition Program stands in the gap, providing nutrition services in group settings, through congregate meal sites, and in the home through Meals on Wheels. Thirteen Senior Nutrition Projects or Community Cafés staff over 200 Congregate Meals sites and Meals on Wheels programs around the state.

The Elderly Nutrition Program is targeted to those who need it most. According to a 2003, Administration on Aging report entitled *Pilot Study: First National Survey of Older Americans Act Title III Service Recipients*, 73% of Meals on Wheels recipients surveyed had a high nutritional risk and 62% received one half or more of their daily food intake from their home delivered meal. 36% of Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals respondents reported that they did not always have enough money or food stamps to buy food.

Funding for the Elderly Nutrition Program allows for advances in the quality and the quantity of the food being served. More nutritionally at-risk seniors will be able to participate, leading to growth and expansion in the program. In addition dietary modification, an important part of treatment, could be included as a component of our elderly nutrition programs, positively impacting elderly people facing nutrition-related chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

In Connecticut the demand for the WIC Program for Fresh Produce for Seniors far outweighs the \$87,688 in federal funding and \$88,267 in state funding available to operate the program. Last summer only 18,514 seniors were able to use \$15 worth of coupons to purchase fruits and vegetables from Connecticut farmers. Seniors are deemed eligible for the program if they meet one of the following criteria: 1) live in subsidized housing, 2) participate in a Congregate Meal program or, 3) qualify for the Renter's Rebate program. Through a state funded expansion another 36,000 seniors at or below 185% of the FPL could stand to benefit from this program.

End Hunger Connecticut! is committed to keeping federal funding strong for this program in the 2007 federal Farm Bill and we are happy that this committee has included additional funding for this funding in SB 1381. An increase in state funding will avail many more seniors of fresh fruit and vegetables from local farmers. This program provides a multiplier effect in the community; it's a win for the seniors and small family farmers. In federal fiscal year 2005, 215 Connecticut farmers, 65 markets and 1 community supported agriculture program participated in the program.

These nutrition programs for low-income Connecticut residents are vital for their health and the health of our communities. People with limited means are able to get quality nutritional foods that are not usually available to them. The increased use of these programs demands that they be expanded to assure that all are fed, as SB 1381 does. High protein foods, not usually donated to emergency food sites is often the only stream of food that they can count on for their clients. The friendly atmosphere and social contact offered by the Elderly Nutrition Program is an integral part of keeping Connecticut's growing senior population healthy and at home while the WIC Program for Fresh Produce for Seniors is a valuable program for seniors and farmers alike; coupons redeemed by seniors keeps farmers farming.

We urge you to pass SB 1381 out of committee to the Appropriations Committee.

Thank you.