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Testimony in favor of Raised Bill 415: An Act Concerning Appropriations for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Grants for the Emergency and Community Food Sites.

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 wish to speak on **RB 415, An Act Concerning Appropriations for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Grants for the Emergency and Community Food Sites.**

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 $372,663, which is matched in federal SSBG funds with an additional $300,000. This is 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 $26 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 $372,000.** Putting additional funds into this line item 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. The $2 million that this legislation calls for, while more than Connecticut has put into the program in the past, is significantly less than our neighbors do. With the increase in funding many people all over the state could be well fed. 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.

Additionally, End Hunger Connecticut! supports creating one time "Capacity Building Grants" for the emergency food sites. These grants would allow local food pantries, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters to increase transportation of fresh produce and high nutrition foods through specially equipped trucks, to replace outmoded energy inefficient refrigerators and freezers with walk-in coolers for larger agencies, increase shelf-space and equip agencies with computers and facsimile machines to increase accessibility to the Food Stamp Program and other nutrition programs. Additionally, these funds need to be available for small infrastructure needs that arise due to the use of the Capacity Building Grants.

While the food banks often offer grants for their members they are generally smaller by nature, and some may ask the sites to match the grants. The Capacity Building Grants would enhance the emergency food system by creating the ability to store and give out healthier foods and to connect to the federal nutrition programs that are so effective in creating self-sufficiency for those using the sites. End Hunger Connecticut! has a web-based tool that allows people to determine if they are eligible for food stamps (www.ctfoodstamps.org). Using these grants the sites can help their clients apply for the program or connect with other federal food programs such as WIC and Summer Food (food for children up to 18 years old when school is out). EHC! has food stamp outreach workers throughout the state and with the proper infrastructure they can be virtually anywhere at anytime.

Giving emergency sites the ability to buy better storage systems not only allows for the storage of healthier foods as mentioned above, but will help the sites save in energy costs. One of our member groups currently has 4 refrigerators and 10 freezers to serve their pantry, kitchen and shelter. These units were donated and are not energy star rated – in fact their electric bill is over $1,200 a month – and soon to be going up. There are limited funds for these sites and so much more could be done if some of them could be freed up with the use of energy efficient appliances.

End Hunger Connecticut! asks you to look at the whole state of Connecticut, to look at the state's response to the food insecure and to increase SSNAP funding to $2 million and to create a base of $2 million for one time Capacity Building Grants for the state's emergency food system to increase their reach to create self-sufficiency and food secure residents and neighborhoods.

Thank you.