



February 18, 2009

Testimony in regard to the Governor's Biennium Budget.

### **NUTRITION ASSISTANCE**

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Kate Walton and I am the Program Director at Connecticut Food Bank, the food bank for New Haven, Middlesex, Fairfield, New London, Windham and Litchfield counties. We supply the local food pantries, soup kitchens and other community food sites in those counties with low cost food to distribute.

Support for nutrition assistance is desperately needed in virtually every community both rural and urban throughout Connecticut. Funds for this vital purpose have been preserved and modestly expanded in the Governor's proposed budget. But the need exceeds current and proposed levels of funding, and has for some time. Last year, before the budget deficit was fully realized and before the entire national economy sank to the current low, Connecticut Food Bank and our colleagues had identified the dire need to increase support for nutrition. In fact Bill No. 415 had been put forth and recommended for funding and would have increased state support to \$1,000,000, before the legislature chose not to vote for the Governor's midterm budget adjustments.

Our emergency food system is primarily staffed and funded by volunteers and faith based communities, where particularly in urban centers, their own capacity to serve others in need, is severely limited by substandard facilities and lack of funds. Areas with high densities of poverty and chronic illness, are truly living on a hand to mouth basis and are further stressed by the fragility of the food chain as a whole.

Since providing testimony on this matter one year ago, as predicted, the demand for nutrition assistance has increased by an average of 30% at soup kitchens, pantries, and human service provider programs that serve food. A new subset of food insecure people has since emerged – formerly two income middle class families where one of the earners has lost their employment. Their debt obligations and bills can no longer be met, yet as a family unit their income still exceeds poverty guidelines thereby making them ineligible for “food stamps” (now SNAP), energy assistance or subsidized health insurance – but they can no longer put food on the table. So we now have former food donors showing up in food lines seeking assistance.

Please keep in mind during your difficult deliberations that food is as basic as air and water to our individual and collective survival. Access to nutritious food has extreme implications both physical, psychological and social. If there is one thing that must be present in sufficient quantities it is food. The health and well being of all in need, whether homeless, housed, educated or uneducated, robust or struggling with disease or disability, young or old or in-between, food must remain on the table. Please do everything in your power to ensure that malnutrition does not become a growing problem during this biennium.

Kate Walton  
Programs Director

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