

**Testimony of Stacy Kamisar**  
**Presented to the Education Committee,**  
**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**March 9, 2009**

Good afternoon. My name is Stacy Kamisar. I would like to thank Chairman Gaffey and Chairman Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee for holding this important hearing, and for your leadership in addressing the issue of food allergies in Connecticut schools.

I am the mother of a 12th grader who has lived with severe food allergies since he was four years old. My son Benjamin is allergic to peanuts, tree nuts, and numerous seeds, including sesame and mustard seed. If he were to consume even a tiny amount of any of these foods, it could trigger a potentially fatal reaction.

Twelve years ago, when Benjamin first entered kindergarten, there were relatively few students with food allergies. But, as the CDC recently reported, the number of American children who suffer from food allergies has increased dramatically over the last decade. Today, an estimated 25,000 school-aged children in Connecticut are living with this life-altering condition. That is why I support the proposed amendments to H.B. 6568, which would give every family easier access to an emergency plan that would protect their child.

Our own family has been extremely fortunate. The Weston schools have always been cooperative and sensitive to Benjamin's needs. This was critical, because no statewide guidelines were available—voluntary or otherwise—during most of his school years. The administration, staff, and parents in Weston schools joined forces and literally invented the wheel. I was thrilled when An Act Concerning Food Allergies was signed into law, providing sensible, standardized food allergy management guidelines that represent the best practices developed by medical experts, schools, and families. When I was asked to review the Weston policies to ensure that they conformed to the new guidelines, I was equally thrilled to find that we had to make very few modifications. I was proud of our partnership and all that we had accomplished together over the years.

However, I must tell you that not all food-allergic families have been so lucky. As the parent of a teen, I get many phone calls from other food-allergic families in neighboring communities who are struggling within their school systems. There still are communities in this state—including some with large school systems—that do not view food allergy management as a priority. Despite the law, some schools have not developed a plan at all. Others have a good written plan, but fail to implement it. Parents who do not have the skills to organize and advocate for their children are at an enormous disadvantage. Under the current system, these families have no place to turn for help. This new bill will go a long way to help families who have nowhere else to turn.

I shudder to think what might have occurred if our school system had not formed a partnership with our family, especially when Ben was a young child. As food-allergic children grow older, they assume greater and greater responsibility for their own safety. But young children, in particular, must depend on their schools to provide a safe environment. By making schools fully accountable for establishing effective food allergy management policies, the proposed amendments will provide all children with the security they deserve. On behalf of food-allergic families throughout Connecticut, I thank you for your consideration of this vital legislation.