

**Testimony for Wednesday February 11, 2009
Elementary Education Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee**

Good afternoon, I am Madeleine Diker, Food Service Director for the Cheshire Public Schools Child Nutrition Program. I am also a former president and current member of the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut. SNACT is a non profit organization made up of 560 food service professionals in 94 child nutrition programs across our state and with a national organization in Washington D.C.

I am here today to speak to the serious concerns that our food service directors in our organization have in regard to proposed legislation introduced by Senator McKinney and Representative Cafero in the Governor's bill No. 830 LCO No 2980.

The bill, in essence proposes cutting the Healthy Nutrition Certification funding in half from ten cents to five cents a meal. **Why is this significant? Our number one priority is the nutritional well being of our students.** We place emphasis on purchasing high quality food and snack items that fit in with the healthy Connecticut Nutrition Standards. If our funding is drastically reduced by half the child nutrition programs across the state will not be able to afford to purchase food items made with whole grain, fresh cut up produce and reduced fat, and low sodium snacks.

It was just two years ago that after **23 years of no increases in Connecticut state funding** and a tough fight right here at the state capitol, we FINALLY received a 10 cent increase.

If a district certifies and follows the CT Nutrition Standards they are eligible to receive 10 cents per meal. The 10 cents per meal began in 2006-07. The total funding for 2008-09 is \$3,271,523.

The 10 cents per meal is distributed to districts that certify they follow the standards developed by the CT State Department of Education. This standard addresses the nutritional content of all food items sold to students separately from a reimbursable school lunch or breakfast. The standards focused on decreasing fat, saturated fats, trans fats, sodium sugars, moderating portion sizes and increasing the consumption of nutrient rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy lean meat and legumes. All schools in any district that chooses to comply with healthy food certification under Section 10-215f of the CT general statutes must follow the CT Nutrition Standards for all sources of food sales to students, including but not limited to school cafeterias, vending machines, school stores and many fund raising activities on school premises.

What did these new Connecticut Nutrition standards mean for Cheshire? It meant our vending sales plummeted by 75%. It meant our ala carte sales dropped. Unfortunately Ala Carte sales supports the reimbursable meal program. That was the bad news. The good news is over the past few years the students got used to the new healthy offerings, such as whole grain pizza, brown rice, and fresh cut up fruit, baked chips, whole grain rolls, and reduced fat muffins and reduced fat cookies. Student participation has recovered.

Our food service programs in Connecticut are self sustaining and that means that we have to cover our own costs. The child nutrition programs are separate from the local Board of Education budgets. To go back is unacceptable, especially with the fact that for many of us free and reduced lunch request have significantly increased due to these tough economic times and food costs are rising.

Connecticut leads the nation in serving healthy nutritious options. Our industry partners have changed the formulations of the products they offer and sell to reflect the Connecticut standards. The Connecticut Nutrition standards are not only good for the individual child's health but also benefits businesses by encouraging the development of new products and has resulted in an emerging niche market of healthy options in the school food service industry. Please do not support any bill that would reduce the funding on this important topic of child nutrition, and health.

Thank you.
Respectfully Madeleine C. Diker