



**Governor's Bill No. 830: AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION.**

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dawn Crayco and I am the Child Nutrition Advocate of End Hunger Connecticut!, a state-wide anti-hunger and food security organization. I am here tonight to speak to adjustments in the appropriations to the State Department of Education budget through the Governor's Recommendations.

I would like to address two areas- one is the School Breakfast line item. While this program is primarily funded with federal dollars, the state has traditionally added a small amount of funding to it as well. However, unlike the federal government and most other states in the country, Connecticut does not reimburse schools on a per meal basis, but reimburses with "available funds". This means, that the more meals served, the fewer the cents are in reimbursement. At present, the schools are reimbursed less than \$0.05 per meal from the state.

The Governor's budget anticipates forty new schools signing on to the School Breakfast Program and allocates no added funds to account for the extra meals-meaning all participating schools will get less funds because there's less money in the school breakfast pot. Sadly, this year marks the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row CT is last in the nation in the number of schools offering schools breakfast. Less reimbursement for schools will not help bring any additional schools on-but could actually act as a deterrent to offer school breakfast. Passing this legislation would move CT in the opposite direction of the rest of the country where school breakfast being recognized and utilized as tool to improve test scores and decrease behavioral issues in the classroom.

My second comment is regarding section 19 of GB no. 830 which suggests decreasing the amount of money school districts receive for agreeing to the state's Healthy Food Certification standards. Currently, if schools choose to serve only healthy foods, as described by the State Department of Education, then they receive an additional \$0.10 per meal served. This national precedent has been a huge incentive for over 80 school districts to serve healthier menu items.

The Governor's recommendation to cut the \$.10 per meal incentive to \$.05 will be prohibitive in continuing to serve higher quality food to students. For example, with such a decrease, Hartford Public Schools would receive \$175,000 less funding per year, causing a raise in lunch prices for families and cutting fresh fruits and vegetables- districts will be forced to go in the opposite direction as the initial program intended and families will feel the brunt. The price of food is not going down as this legislation suggests- instead they're rising, making it already very difficult for districts to stay in the black. On top of sacrificing nutritional quality, districts will be considering their financial viability in funding other vital programs such as the Summer Food Service Program that feeds thousands of children in CT each summer.

From a food security perspective, school breakfast and/or school lunch are sometimes of the only meals students of low income households receive. It's our responsibility to make them the healthiest they can be with the current financial limitations in purchasing whole and fresh foods. Nationally, studies prove that schools that remove junk food have more students partaking in school lunches and serve many more free and reduced price meals. More meals means more federal dollars AND healthier children.

The very reason that the National School Lunch Program began in 1946 was as a "measure of national security" in response to the fact that many young WWII draftees were nutritionally unfit to go to war. Today this program ensures that children in the United States receive at least one healthy meal per school day guaranteeing our continued national security. During the current economic climate, it is important we stay true to this foundation by continuing to maintain and grow funding for these federal nutrition programs. Children and families need the state's support more now than ever and we have an opportunity to see this through while bringing more federal dollars into Connecticut.

Thank you.

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